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White Kids and Race:
An Ethnographic Study of White Racial Socialization, Privilege, and the (Re)Production
of Racial Ideology in Affluent Families

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M.A., Lehigh University, 2006
B.A., Lehigh University 2004

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology
2014

Abstract

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By Margaret Ann Hagerman

Theories of contemporary racism offer assertions about how white children produce ideas about race that remain largely untested. Drawing on participant observations in public and private spaces, parent and child interviews, and content analysis, this two-year ethnographic study of thirty white affluent families with middle-school-aged children explores the role that family plays in shaping how white children form racial knowledge. This study examines how affluent white parents—those whose resources enable them to freely shape and choose their communities, schools, activities, etc.—construct particular racial contexts for their white children, how kids interact within these contexts, and the racial knowledge that white children produce as a result. In contrast to much of the research conducted on racial socialization in black, Latino, and Asian families, I find that explicit and deliberate messages about race are not the primary mechanism of racial socialization in white families. Rather, racial socialization in white families depends on how parents create for their kids what I call a *racial context of childhood.* I define *racial context of childhood* as one that is "designed" by white parents both consciously and unconsciously and includes such things as: decisions about where to live and send their children to school, how to talk (explicitly and implicitly) about race-related issues including affective aspects of these conversations, the opportunity for intergroup contact and friendship formation, patterns of media consumption, and children's access to knowledge about current events and the history of race in America. I find that variation in these racial contexts of childhood is connected to differences in white parents' ideological positions on race and in turn help explain the striking differences in the content of the racial logic expressed by children in the study. Overall, this research explores the complexity and nuance of how racial contexts of childhood are constructed, disjunctures that exist within them, how racial contexts of childhood are experienced and lived, and what the consequences of growing up within them are in terms of how white middle-school-aged children produce knowledge about race, racism, and privilege in contemporary America.

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Acknowledgements

Conducting ethnographic research requires an incredible amount of patience, perseverance, and people in your life telling you that it will, in fact, all come together, eventually. I would never have been able to complete this dissertation without the guidance and encouragement of my mentors, colleagues, family, and friends.

In particular, I would like to thank members of my dissertation committee. Amanda Lewis, I am very grateful for everything that you have taught me about race, qualitative methods, writing, and navigating graduate school. Thank you for being a supportive and honest advisor, for having high expectations of me, for modeling brilliant scholarship on race and young people, and for hosting such fun dinner parties. Tyrone Forman, thank you for helping me make sense of my data, for teaching me about the social psychology of race, for supporting my research interests, and for always having such a great sense of humor. Heather Johnson, this dissertation is rooted in questions you first introduced to me at Lehigh in your powerful undergraduate seminar, *Race and Class in America*. Thank you for teaching me how to think sociologically, for encouraging me to pursue the question of "how can this be?," for always supporting me both academically and otherwise, and for being such a special and influential person in my life. Bill Corsaro, thank you for encouraging me to conduct ethnographic research with children, for reading chapter drafts, and for our productive and interesting conversations at ASA meetings. I have learned so much from you. Irene Browne, thank you for supporting my intellectual interests in race and the family, for teaching me how to use MAXQDA (and Endnote!), and for providing me with the opportunity to be your Research Assistant.

I would also like to thank my graduate school colleagues, Chelsea Jackson, Isabella Alexander, Celeste Lee, Roselyn Thomas, Georgiann Davis, Mosi Ifatunji, Kendra Freeman, and Jessie Reeder, for their help throughout different stages of this project. Liz Alexander and Michelle Manno: I could not have done this without you two especially. Thank you for your feedback on my ideas, your constant reassurance, our writing group meetings, your friendship, and all the jokes (and wine) along the way.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the support and love of my family. Thank you to my parents, Jean and Doug Hagerman, for always believing in me, for encouraging me to "keep at it," and for supporting me throughout graduate school in every way imaginable. Thank you to Mikyla Smith for always keeping me grounded, offering useful perspective, and making me laugh when necessary. Thank you to James Hagerman for the crucial computer help and brotherly teasing along the way. Thank you to my grandmother, JoAnne Sinden Hagerman, who received her first of two Master Degrees in 1948, for inspiring me, encouraging me, and being such a strong role model in my life. I will always cherish our after-dinner discussions about the world's problems, Grandma. And thank you to Eric Vivier for pushing me to work harder, for helping me with my writing, for listening to me talk about this project endlessly, and for having unwavering faith in me. I'm so glad we are still walking to the library together, Eric.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank the parents and children in this study who opened their homes to me, welcomed me into their lives, invited me to their soccer games and birthday parties, and shared with me their honest perspectives about personal and controversial topics.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

"Racism is not a problem anymore…Racism was a problem when all those slaves were around and that like bus thing… And like Eleanor Roosevelt, and how she went on the bus. And she was African American and sat on the white part…but after the 1920s and all that, things changed." – Natalie (age 11)

"I think [racism] is a WAY bigger problem than people realize. It's nowhere near what it used to be… it's just different and white people don't realize it… I think it's still there. It's just not as present and people want to hide it. Because they are scared to talk about it." – Conor (age 11)

Natalie Schultz and Conor Norton-Smith are eleven-year-old white children. Natalie and Conor both live in families that are upper-middle-class, and they both live in the same Midwestern metropolitan area. Despite these similarities, however, these two kids have divergent interpretations of race in America. While Natalie believes that race *does not matter* in America today and that racism and racial inequality are things of the past, Conor believes that race *does matter* in contemporary American society and that racism and racial inequality continue to be social problems in America.

How can it be that these two children, along with thirty other child participants in this study, have such strikingly different perspectives on race in America? And how do these divergent racial understandings develop/emerge? What do these patterns in racial common sense-making tell us about the racial socialization of white youth? This dissertation asks (1) what ideas are white, affluent, middle-school aged children currently producing about the state of race in America, (2) how is it that these children come to

form these ideas about race, and (3) what role does the institution of family play in this process of white racial socialization?

The Role of Childhood in Theories of Contemporary Racism

Over the past several decades, a number of race scholars have suggested that whites' ideas about race form in childhood. Bonilla-Silva (2006), for instance, speaks to the existence of a "socialization process that conditions and creates whites'…views on racial matters" (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 104). Similarly, in their theorizing about racial resentment, Kinder and Sanders (1996) write:

> Prejudice is an acquired taste. Children enter the world free of any such animosity, but their innocence is temporary, for they are born into a world in which socially significant distinctions are already in place. By the time American children enter elementary school, they know that racial groups exist, and that persons belong to such groups on the basis of observable characteristics…they know which racial group they belong to, and they know which racial groups are good and which are bad…By the early adult years, racial ideas are difficult to reverse; at this stage, race has become a standard and automatic way of categorizing and evaluating the social world (110).

Despite the claims of these and many other prominent race theorists, very limited empirical evidence demonstrates how this process works or what it looks like.

Similarly, as part of their theory of "symbolic racism," Sears and Henry's (2003) claim that "common cultural values [are] presumed to be acquired in the pre-adult years." Here, the assumption is again made that children "acquire" commonsense ideas about race, yet no interrogation into how this process works is offered. Further, these kinds of statements and arguments contain within them the presumption that children are "blank slates" who uncritically take up dominant racial ideas of the society in which they live, a presumption that conflicts with current literature on children's agency and active participation in socialization processes (Corsaro 2011; Hughes 2003).

Whether they be social psychological models, social structural models, or political models, these theories of contemporary racism offer mostly unexplained assertions about how children, the newest members of society, "pick up" or "adopt" the racial ideas they discuss, ideas imagined to be shaped by the racialized social system into which they are born and "hard to reverse" once adopted/taken up (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Bonilla-Silva 2006). While, of course, children learn about race throughout childhood, how such racial ideas are "acquired" needs theoretical and empirical elaboration. Especially in a sociopolitical moment in which few whites claim a "racist" identity or actively teach their children how to behave in overtly prejudiced ways and a moment in which many white adults claim to be colorblind and "post-racial", how exactly white children acquire ideas about race deserves attention. What does this look like? What are the outcomes? What role do parents play in the process? And how can children's agency and their own participation in their production of ideas be accounted for within this broader process of racial socialization?

Racial Socialization in Families of Color

Historically, scholars have discussed this process of developing ideas about race in childhood as "racial socialization." Racial socialization is defined as the transmission processes through which adults convey messages to children that "shape children's understandings of and attitudes toward their own and other racial/ethnic groups" (Hughes 2003). Most early studies of racial socialization focused on how parents of black children prepare their kids for experiences of racial discrimination (Bowman & Howard 1985, Peters 2002). This body of research focused on understanding what lessons parents teach their children about race in order to help their children develop strategies for countering

racism and to build resilience and empowerment (Knight et al. 1993; Phinney & Chavira 1995; Brega & Coleman 1999). Racial socialization of black children has been classified in terms of the parents seeking to cultivate the following four categories in their children: racial pride, self-development, racial barriers, and humanitarian values (Bowman and Howard 1985).[1]

Studies of racial socialization have broadened in scope over the last two decades, documenting racial socialization as an "important component of childrearing" (Hughes 2003) among black, Latino, Japanese-American, and biracial families (Phinney and Chavira 1995; Brega and Coleman 1999; Rollins and Hunter 2013). Overall this work shows that "minority socialization" usually includes *direct and explicit messages* conveyed from parents to children about race, particularly as parents prepare their children for living within a hostile racial environment (Rollins and Hunter, 2013). However, despite its increasing scope, still very little of this work has focused on the racial socialization of white children.

The United States continues to be a place where race shapes the experiences of individuals and families and a place where a racial hierarchy persists. As such, the messages about race that are shared within families of color cannot be generalized to white families. For instance, many white adults believe that race no longer matters in

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[1] Messages about racial pride include information about the historical background of blacks and positive attitudes and commitments toward the black race. In child terms, this may be articulated as, "You should be friends with blacks." Messages about self-development move away from talking about race explicitly and focus instead on teaching the development of skills and character outside of race. To children, this may appear as, "Dream big." Racial barrier messages introduce children to the reality of discrimination that they are likely to encounter as they make their way through American society and include statements similar to, "Whites think they are better than Blacks." Finally, values of humanitarianism emphasize the recognition of all people as being equal, regardless of their race or ethnicity (Brega and Coleman 1999). Here, the child might be told, "Everyone can be friends no matter race they are." Studies demonstrate that consistently focusing on strategies limited to one of these four categories is more successful in building a positive self-concept in children due to the ambiguity that arises when messages from these categories contradict one another (Bowman and Howard 1985).

America and that the country is "post-racial" (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000; Carr, 1997; Crenshaw 1997; Forman 2004; Forman & Lewis 2006; Lewis 2003). Given these popular ideas about race shared by many white American adults, what is the content of the messages about race white parents share with their children?

In addition to examining the content of messages of racial socialization, scholars such as Knight et al. (1993) have examined the mechanisms through which racial socialization messages are transmitted to black children. These modes of transmission have been classified into four categories: direct instruction, modeling, feedback (reacting to the child's behavior in ways that teach racial knowledge), or other-generated experience (selectively exposing kids to particular environments). Research shows that parents typically rely on more than one of these modes of racial socialization and that children benefit from a varied approach (Knight et al. 1993). A key component of this research is that racial socialization in black families is often an explicit and conscious choice. Even when parents use subtle mechanisms to convey information about race to their children, their choice to actively work with their kids to promote a particular type of racial knowledge is intentional.

Additional research, such as the work of Hughes and Johnson (2001), advances understandings of racial socialization beyond the content and mechanisms of this process by examining not only the parents' behaviors but also by exploring the children's experiences. Similar to the work of scholars identifying with the New Sociology of Childhood, these researchers argue that parenting, in general, is a bidirectional process. This means that parents shape their own behaviors based on what is happening in their

child's social and personal world. Thus, understanding how racial socialization works

ought to include the active role children play in these parenting practices:

> …children are unlikely to be passive recipients of racial socialization messages. As
> curious, observant, and developing social beings, children are likely to pose questions,
> comments, and critiques that foster and shape parents' racial socialization behaviors.
> Thus, more transactional models of racial socialization in which children's behavior and
> experiences play a role in initiating parental behavior, are needed. Thus, in light of
> increasing interest in racial socialization, alongside evidence that it has important
> consequences for children's identity and well-being, it seems important for social
> scientists to build a knowledge base regarding children's contributions to shaping racial
> socialization" (Hughes and Johnson 2001).

Research documents that children of color initiate racial socialization in many

cases as a result of posing questions to their parent about racial identity. For example,

during stages of racial identity development, scholars have documented periods of

personal exploration on the behalf of adolescents as they try to define the group to which

they belong for themselves (Cross, 1991; Phinney, 1990). In addition, exploring racial

meaning and defining oneself leads to children, particularly as they transition into

adolescence, asking their parents new questions about race and ethnicity (Hughes & Chen

1999). Another situation in which children's experiences prompt parental responses are

when kids come into contact with discrimination and prejudice (Phinney & Chavira

1995). As kids get older and enter spheres outside of their homes, such as school, they are

more likely to encounter discrimination; for children of color, these encounters are

upsetting and often prompt parents to start sharing more with their children in terms of

racial attitudes, intergroup relations (Biafora et al. 1993).

Overall, studies of racial socialization document the messages conveyed to

children of color as well as the mechanisms parents draw upon to convey these ideas.

And while some of these mechanisms may appear to be subtle, overall, the literature

shows that parents of children of color are *consciously, explicitly, and deliberately*

working to teach their children how to navigate the existing racial landscape as a young person of color. Children themselves are also participating in this process of racial socialization through asking questions of their parents, participating in interactions with other children and adults, and making their own sense of the various messages they receive from the people surrounding them.

Studies of Whiteness, Privilege, and Childhood

While much research on racial socialization has focused on the experiences of children of color, very little research examines this process in families with racial privilege, that is, white families—how do white parents engage in racial socialization of their white children?

In order to answer this question, we must first consider the position whites as a group occupy within the racial hierarchy in place within America society. Whites share with each other a dominant structural position within the *racialized social system*. This dominant group position is often invisible to whites, as is the privilege that accompanies it and the attempts the group makes to maintain such privilege (McIntosh 1988; Frankenberg 1993; Anderson 2003). As Dyer (1997) puts it, "as long as race is something only applied to non-white people, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people" (Dyer 1997:1).

The term *racialized social system* refers to "societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races… [this organization reflects a] form of hierarchy that produces definite social relations between the races. The totality of these racialized social

relations and practices constitutes the racial structure of a society" (Bonilla-Silva 1997:

469). Racism enters the racialized social system as a racial ideology that provides people

with "common sense" ideas that help people make meaning about the world around them.

These ideas serve a practical role in helping people make sense of the structure as well as

justify inequality within it (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2006).

Conceptualizing American society as a racialized social system allows for both

the recognition that contemporary racial ideology exists as well as how society is

structured in racial terms at all levels. In addition, the theory views racial actors as

"rational" and explains both overt and covert racial behavior (Bonilla-Silva 1997). This

theoretical apparatus also allows scholarship to move away from finding out individual

racists and instead, moving in the direction of understanding how commonsense ideas of

race, privilege and inequality are constructed. In general, understanding society as a

racialized social system allows for a refined characterization and explanation of race

relations in the United States.

Given the dominant group position of whites, scholars find that white people

often do not recognize their whiteness, think about their race, or view themselves as even

having a race in some cases. Instead, they see themselves as nonracial or racially neutral

(Lewis 2001). The system of white privilege is invisible to many whites and is instead, as

Lewis (2001: 623) puts it, "about others—minority groups generally, and often black in

particular." As Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Gallagher (1997) demonstrate empirically, white

college students have a difficult time describing their own racial identity and the

meanings attached to being white. Being white is to be "normal" and in some instances

"raceless" as Perry (2001) illustrates in her ethnographic study of youth in high school

settings. Gallagher (1997) argues that this practice of claiming no race is in a moment of flux and possible change in response to current racial politics, but that even still, the meanings attached to being white are "schizophrenic." As Frankenberg (1993) states in her conclusions from studying white women, "the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility" (Frankenberg 1993: 6).

By claiming not to see race, whites can justify their position of racial dominance. "In a society riddled with social inequality, ideologies must naturalize a system that ensures subordination for millions" (Lewis 2004: 632). Ideology, here, refers to the common-sense understanding of the social world, the "taken for granteds" that serve to help people make sense of their lives and "naturalize the status quo" (Hall 1990; Lewis 2003: 33). These ideologies seep into our worlds, defining for us what is "normal" and what is not. The fact that the structural location of whites is invisible to whites connects directly to the formation of the racial ideology of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva 1997; 2006; Gallagher 2003; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000) or, alternatively named, the discourse of "color and power evasion" (Frankenberg 1993).

In a very similar way, by claiming to live in a meritocracy, or adhering to the ideology of the American Dream, poverty, for instance, can be explained as the simple result of individuals not working hard enough. As Johnson (2006) writes:

> People of privileged positions…are able to use the American Dream to justify and legitimize their positions and pass along a sense of entitlement to these positions to their own children…this allows them to assuage any sense of guilt, compassion or empathy they might feel…and it allows them to assuage any sense of social responsibility or moral obligation they might otherwise feel toward using their power in altruistic, generous ways in the interest of progressive social change for the greater good (Johnson 2006: 170).

Here, the importance of ideology is not only that it helps people rationalize the status

quo, but it also provides people in positions of privilege with a way of feeling better

about their privilege, about avoiding any sort of responsibility or negative affective

response. Overall, the structural location of whites and the white racial ideologies that

accompany this particular group's privileged position within the racial hierarchy is

central to understanding how whiteness gets taken up, produced, and experienced by

children who receive the unearned but potentially also unrecognized wages of whiteness

(Roediger 1991).

In terms of childhood socialization then, how does growing up in a position of

racial privilege influence what one learns about race? The work of Beverly Tatum (1997),

in which she briefly discusses typical responses observed from white parents when their

white children ask them questions about race, is a good place to start in answering this

question:

> Many adults do not know how to respond when children make race-related observations.
> Imagine this scenario. A white mother and preschool child are shopping in the grocery
> store. They pass a black woman and child, and the white child says loudly, "Mommy,
> look at that girl! Why is she so dirty?" (Confusing dark skin with dirt is a common
> misconception among white preschool children.) The white mother, embarrassed by her
> child's comment, responds quickly with a "Ssh!" An appropriate response may have
> been: "Honey, that little girl is not dirty. Her skin is as clean as yours. It's just a different
> color. Just like we have different hair color, people have different skin colors."…Perhaps
> afraid of saying the wrong thing, however, many parents don't offer an explanation. They
> stop at "Ssh," silencing the child but not responding to the question or the reasoning
> underlying it. Children who have been silenced often enough learn not to talk about race
> publicly. Their questions don't go away, they just go unasked (36).

Tatum also discusses how, "I often hear from white parents who tell me with

pride that their children are 'colorblind.'" She shares an anecdote about a white father

and his daughter:

> One day when he picked up his daughter from school, he asked her to point out her new
> friend. Trying to point her out of a large group of children on the playground, his
> daughter elaborately described what the child was wearing. She never said she was the

only Black girl in the group. Her father was pleased that she had not, a sign of her colorblindness. I wondered if...it was a sign that she had learned not to be so impolite as to mention someone's race (37).

While Tatum's anecdotal observations and discussion about white racial identity formation are useful to this discussion, it provides hints and starting points for further empirical exploration. And, aside from Tatum's work, hardly any research can be found on how parents of white children participate in racial socialization, or the role that the institution of the white family plays in reproducing or challenging the racial status quo in the newest generation.

Aside from the anecdotal evidence form Tatum's work, there are lots of reasons to suspect that the content and process of white racial socialization is quite different than that documented in work on families of color. For example, the broader literature on contemporary whiteness documents how most/many whites talk about race in elusive and contradictory, roundabout ways (Lewis 2004; Forman & Lewis 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gallagher 1999; McKinney 2005). This suggests that the intentional and deliberate nature of racial socialization at work in families of color might look quite different from those operating in white families. Based on what we know about how white adults talk about race and racial identity we might expect them to engage in practices of white racial socialization that are more subtle, idiosyncratic, if not actually unconscious or unintentional.

Children's Racial Meaning-Making at School

While studies that examine the role the white family plays in processes of racial socialization are scarce, sociologists have theorized and demonstrated empirically that schools (including preschools) are institutions that play a major role in the racial

socialization of white children and the formation of dominant white racial ideology (Lewis 2003; Hochschild and Scovronick 2003; Perry 2001; Van Ausdale & Feagin 2001; Connolly 1998; Swartz 1997; Fine 1991; Apple 1982; Mills 1956, among others). Schools have been a central research site for examining these lessons because of the way they bring together children, parents and the state and become a space in which "social, cultural, and political battles surface and are fought out" (Lewis 2003: 20; Woodhouse 2008).

Perhaps one of the most compelling accounts of the ways race is learned, lived, constructed and negotiated by children and adults in schools is the ethnographic work of Amanda Lewis (2003). Lewis (2003) explores how race operates in different elementary school contexts and the effect on how students develop racial subjectivities. "Different environs also can lead to different understandings of what race means" (Lewis 2003, 127). For instance, in one school, Foresthills Elementary, Lewis (2003) explores "how race operates in all-white or almost all-white settings" finding that colorblindness "enabled all members of the community to avoid confronting the racial realities that surround them, to avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings, and to avoid dealing with racist events (by deracializing them)" (34). In the second school, West City Elementary, while the "physical and social geography was racially coded, racial tensions were present, and racial understandings played a role in daily life…it was also a place where race was seldom discussed" (39). Despite this finding though, Lewis demonstrates that the children at this school knew, for instance, that "black boys are unruly" as a result of witnessing racial patterns in discipline (79). Finally, in the third school context, Metro2, Lewis finds that even in a context where the "school operated in

many culturally progressive ways, the personnel's collective efforts to subvert traditional racial hierarchies still faced many challenges" (Lewis 2003, 87). What this ethnographic work shows, thus, is that while race operates differently across these three school contexts, the mechanisms at play "lead many children of color to have fundamentally different schooling experiences than their white peers do." Overall then, schools are race-making institutions as they convey particular messages to the children who attend them, though the contexts of these institutions vary in ways that are meaningful.

Through in-depth interviews and ethnographic research at two different high schools, Pamela Perry (2001) also examines variations in school contexts. Perry demonstrates that students' white identity and cultural routines vary across schools with differing racial demographics. Perry finds that white identity meant different things to white students in these two different schools, challenging the notion that all white teenagers think about whiteness in the same way.

Similarly, by conducting ethnographic research with eighth graders, Kenny (2000) is also able to explore variations in the ways white girls construct "normative white femininity" and what it means to grow up white, middle class and female to these girls (Kenny 2000: 5). The strength of her work is the way that she considers the local, meaning-making processes of the girls she studies as well as the meanings the girls themselves create around race. Kenny (2001) also documents how "white middle-classness thrives on not being recognized as a cultural phenomenon" and how young girls living in white middle-class communities receive race and class privilege in ways that seem "natural" (Kenny 2000: 1). In terms of growing up white within the community she studies, Kenny states that "through a brief analysis of local discussions…it becomes clear

that [the town] largely sees itself as a community without race and thereby attempts to bypass the issue all together. Hence, avoidance characterizes whiteness [here]. In a world where race neutrality is prized over specific racial identities, by sidestepping race, the community actually positions itself and its offspring firmly within a culture of racial privilege" (Kenny 2000: 17). In terms of the girls themselves, Kenny finds that the girls:

> saw through their parents' color-blindness, exploiting the underlying hypocrisies of such a position for their own gain. While among themselves SWR girls may have had little use for racial Others, in relation to the parents, girls used race and their parents' prejudices or thinly veiled color-blindness to capture their parents' attentions, to differentiate themselves from their families, and to express the inexpressible: their own fears and hesitations with regard to nonwhite identity (Kenny 2000: 184).

For example, one girl "insists on dressing hip-hop style, while her mother refuses to be seen with her when she's dressed 'black'" (Kenny 2000: 184). In another case, a father will not allow his daughter to get her ears pierced because then she will look "Puerto Rican." As this girl states, "He's soooo prejudiced" (Kenny 2000: 185). As Kenny writes, while the adult community engages in "color/power evasion language, discourses that do not acknowledge histories of present day circumstance of oppression that constitute race in the United States," the girls, through opposition to their families, could use the "prejudices" of their parents as a way of articulating that they are "conscious of racial and ethnic differences" (Kenny 2000: 185). Here, it is clear that white kids think about race and in many ways, use race to challenge their parents, at least in adolescence. The appeal of Kenny's work in particular is the examination into how colorblindness plays out in white communities and within white families. In addition, her focus on the meaning-making processes white girls undergo in relation to social structures like race, class, and gender provides important insight into the role that children play in the reproduction and reworking of inequality.

Scholars have also used schools as sites to study race and peer interaction. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), for instance, provide insight into what young children—both white and black—think about race in their observations at a preschool. Observing preschool aged children in their daily lives over the course of a year, this research focuses on interactions children have with one another, revealing the ideas about race that children are in the process of forming. Findings from this study describe the "racialized nature of children's language, concepts, and interactions," illustrating that children as young as three have ideas about race from the broader society in which they live, including white children's negative perceptions of black children. These ideas structure the interactions and kinds of play children have at preschool. However, this research demonstrates that the ideas about race articulated by children in the study are fluid, particularly the categories children move between while playing together, for instance. Theoretically, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001, 28) suggest that because children live in a larger societal context that is racist, they "come to age in a framework of systemic racism" in which "much racial socialization is unconscious" and "barely discernible to them as a component of everyday life," at least in terms of white children.

Further studies examining both context and social interaction include the work of scholars like Scott (2002, 2003) and Moore (2001, 2002), in which they examine interaction between peers and how race operates across social groups in a school environment. Scott's research examined these interactions across two demographically different school contexts, finding that in the middle class, racially diverse context, girl's friendships were largely segregated by race, white girls often being leaders within the one social club that was racially mixed. Girls left out were often black. At the second school,

a predominantly black school, egalitarian play was far more common with less exclusion occurring. Moore (2001, 2002), also studying two different contexts of summer camp, found that six to twelve year olds attending a traditional camp engaged children of color by asking them "who they were in a sense as being different from whites and white culture" (Corsaro 2011: 228). At the second camp, a "cultural awareness camp," Moore found that there was more instability in the cliques and children shifted between cliques more easily.

From these studies of children in different contexts, we learn about both the content of racial messages conveyed at school and in communities (such as colorblind ideas, the notion that to be white is to be 'normal' or 'cultureless', negative ideas about people and communities of color, who is the leader in a clique, etc.) and we learn about the mechanisms that are delivering these messages (explicit behaviors of teachers and school personnel, implicit and subtle classroom dynamics, peer interactions, etc.). We also see the significance of context in shaping the process of racial meaning making. While these qualitative studies of white children and schools/camps provide some insight into how white children produce ideas about race at school, many questions remain. In particular, what role does the white family play in white racial socialization? And what specific contextual factors influence the process of white racial socialization altogether?

Theories of Childhood Socialization

To begin to answer these questions, I turn to the work of William Corsaro. As Corsaro (2011) describes, two broad theoretical approaches have been proposed to explain the process of socialization altogether, or how children "adapt to and internalize society" (9). Deterministic approaches view the child as passive, or as a sponge, whereas

constructivist approaches view the child as an "active agent" who "actively constructs his or her own social world and his or her place in it" (9). Over time, scholars have increasingly moved away from deterministic models, like those of Parsons and Bales (1955) toward models based in developmental psychology such as the work of Jean Piaget. Offering the idea of equilibrium and his famous idea of developmental stages, Piaget (1932) "is concerned with…the actual activities the child undertakes to deal with problems in the external world" (Corsaro 2011: 13). Corsaro demonstrates that Vygotsky (1978) pushes the idea of children's participation in their own socialization further through Vygotsky's sociocultural view of human development, which argues that children's social development is a collective process: "All our psychological and social skills are always acquired from our interactions with others. We develop and use such skills at the interpersonal level first before internalizing them at the individual level" (Corsaro 2011: 16).

While Corsaro is not focused on *racial* socialization, his model of interpretive reproduction serves as a helpful starting point for my own theoretical contributions. Interpretive reproduction is a model of childhood socialization that considers the "habitual, taken-for-granted character of routines [that] provides children and all social actors with the security and shared understanding of belonging to a social group" (Corsaro 2011: 21). Interpretive reproduction accounts for the active participation of children in cultural reproduction while at the same time, acknowledges the influence of social structure (Corsaro 2011: 21) and as I will argue, the way that race is located and operates within that structure. "Central to this view of socialization is the appreciation of the importance of collective, communal activity—how children negotiate, share, and

create culture with adults and each other" (Corsaro 2011: 20). In this model, language and cultural routines, or the everyday talk and everyday activity of kids in the family context, are central to children's participation in their culture. Language, in particular, is "deeply embedded and instrumental in the accomplishment of the concrete routines of social life" (Schieffelin 1990: 19; Corsaro 2011: 21). Participation in cultural routines begins at birth and over time, children "move from limited to full participation in cultural routines" (Corsaro 2011: 21). As Corsaro continues, this:

> "[this]evolving membership in their cultures is seen as reproductive, not linear…children do not simply imitate or internalize the world around them. They strive to interpret or make sense of their culture and to participate in it. In attempting to make sense of the adult world, children come to collectively produce their own peer worlds and cultures" (Corsaro 2011: 26-7).

Interpretive reproduction is a fundamental aspect of childhood socialization around which I will build my theory of white racial socialization.

In addition to interpretive reproduction, the theoretical approach of Qvortrup (1991) is also central to my own theory of racial socialization. Qvortrup (1991) views childhood as a structural form, arguing that thinking of childhood as part of the social structure allows us to move beyond "individualistic, adult-oriented, and time-bound perspectives to pose and answer a wide range of sociological questions" (as described by Corsaro 2011: 32). This approach moves the study of "the child," which is popular in the field of child development and within traditional theories of socialization, toward the sociological study of "childhood":

> Life phases—among them the periodic phase called childhood—are defined in terms of developmental dispositions: sensory, motoric, morally, intellectually, and sexually. Generational forms are defined in completely different ways. They are not defined with reference to personal dispositions but to its parameters at a given historical juncture in a given society or other larger or smaller political or cultural unit. The parameters to be considered include economic, political, social, cultural, legal, religious, technological, and others, not forgetting mode of socialization. They do not pertain to the person but rather to larger categories like generation or as the case may be: class, gender, or

ethnicity (Qvortrup 2014, 673).

Qvortrup's theoretical approach of thinking as childhood as a structural form—that is, a "permanent structural category" despite children themselves experiencing this period only temporarily—views childhood socialization, then, as a form of cultural production in which "children are themselves coconstructors of childhood and society" (Corsaro 2011: 32, 42). In addition, this theory includes the notion that "parameters" such as ethnicity, or I would argue race, shape the forms that structural childhood takes. Rather than thinking about individual children's formation of racial knowledge, this model allows us to consider groups of children who share membership in structural categories like that of race. Similar to the notion of racism as a structural phenomenon rather than an individual phenomenon (Bonilla-Silva 1997), thinking about childhood at the structural level rather than the individual level offers us the sociological advantages of seeing how childhood is integrated into society, how it changes across societies and time periods, and how it intersects with other structural forms (Qvortrup 2014).

Given what we know about theories of childhood socialization—specifically interpretive reproduction and structural understandings of childhood that move us away from thinking about individual children and instead thinking about groups of children—it seems clear that understanding the interactions that children have within a context of childhood and the outcomes of these interactions is a key task in uncovering how the sociological process of racial socialization works. Therefore, as I will now discuss, understanding the role of context is crucial.

Previous Studies of the Role of Context

How do the contexts in which white people find themselves matter in terms of their commonsense racial knowledge? The term "context" is used frequently in social

science research, often conceptualized as the geographic, demographic, temporal, or social environment in which people live their lives, as discussed with Hartigan (2005) and McDermott (2006) above, for instance. "Context" is also often referenced in the field of child development. As Brofenbrenner famously articulates, for instance, children are embedded within an entire ecological system comprised of micro, meso, and macro level interactions (Bronfenbrenner 2009: The Ecology of Human Development). Whether it be Corsaro's (2011) orb "spider-web" model or Bronfenbrenner's concentric circles that comprise his ecological theory of child development or Qvortrup's structural approach, the social and cultural institutions in which individuals are embedded impact the locations in which "institutional interaction or behavior occurs (Bourdieu 1991)" and thereby shapes the ideas that individuals produce (Corsaro 2011).

Previous research in the field of human ecology and family studies has considered the role that context plays in the racial socialization of children in biracial families. The work of Rollins and Hunter (2013) considers the 'context in which individuals are embedded, and it includes social position variables that influence experiences of racism, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and privilege' (Rollins and Hunter 2013). This research advances the study of racial socialization somewhat in that it considers race as existing beyond just an individual characteristic, like much of the prior existing human development literature. However, though Rollins and Hunter (2013) discuss privilege and racial socialization, the process of white racial socialization and how white children produce knowledge through interactions within their families as well as outside of their families remains unclear. Further, children are still thought of in individual terms in this research as the findings are based on interviews with parents about their own children

rather than bridging parents' perspectives with observations of how kids interact with each other and with adults to produce knowledge collectively.

Context has also been studied in ethnographies about whiteness. Certainly, the availability of particular experiences and interactions matters in terms of how racial meaning gets constructed. Hartigan (1999), for instance, finds that in his study of whiteness in Detroit that:

> The meaning of race not only varies from location to location, depending on the localized effects of economic orders, demographics, dominant political styles, and class compositions but, recursively, that racial identities are constitutive of place: that racial identities are projected onto social space as a means of identifying individuals and positing the significance of their connection to collective orders (Hartigan 1999: 14).

Similarly, in her study of white racial attitudes of working class people living in Atlanta and Boston, McDermott (2006) demonstrates that the meanings attached to whiteness are variable and context-dependent. Specifically, McDermott (2006) explores the locally-situated ways that race and class identity and experiences shape racial attitudes and behavior of whites.

And while these studies rely on the use of "context" frequently, what is "context" and how does it work? What aspects of one's social environment matter in terms of how they form racial knowledge? And, specifically, what aspects of one's childhood context matter for kids and how they, for the first time, engage with the complex idea of race?

A Theory of White Racial Socialization: Racial Context of Childhood

Based on the following dissertation research, I have developed a theoretical model that helps explain why white children like Natalie and Conor produce such different perspectives on race in America as well as how the process of racial socialization works in families with racial privilege. As I will demonstrate, this work refines the theoretical

notion of "context" and provides an empirical understanding of the process of white racial socialization.

I argue that Natalie and Conor are growing up in different *racial contexts of childhood*. By *racial context of childhood*, I mean something very specific. My theory of racial context of childhood does *not* include the entire ecological system or the total "environment of nested structures" surrounding a child or arbitrary factors within a child's life (Bronfenbrenner 2009: 3). Rather, drawing on patterns in my data, a racial context of childhood includes those particular dimensions of one's environment that I have found substantially impact the process of white racial socialization.

Specifically, a racial context of childhood is comprised of the following dimensions: the ideological positions of parents; the parenting choices parents make about neighborhoods, schools, activities, media, friends, and travel experiences; and the types of interactions children then have as a result of these choices. Racial socialization takes place, thus, in the choices parents make about context—the choices which then dictate opportunities for interaction with and observation of the social world. Whereas research on families of color finds deliberate, explicit socialization, white racial socialization can be attributed primarily to the decisions involved in the setting up of context—decisions which may often appear not to be about race at all, but which are in fact shaped by racial ideology.
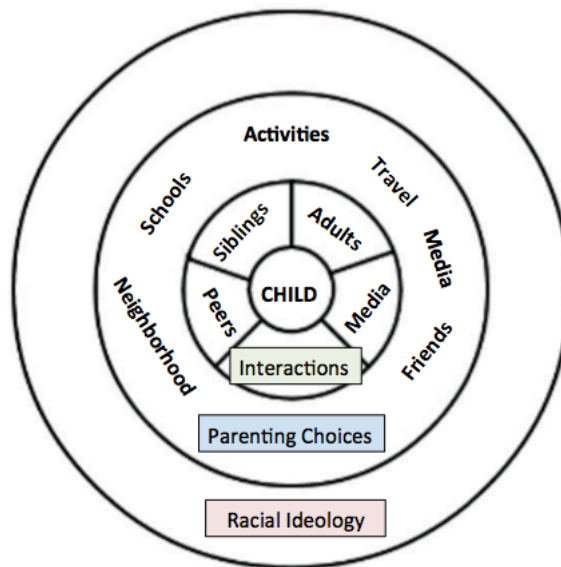
Figure 1. Racial Context of Childhood

Parents deploy particular ideological positions or narrations about race. These positions include, for instance, colorblind views or color-conscious racial views. These ideological positions—in many cases—shape the choices parents make about where to live, where to send their child to school, with whom to interact, etc. These choices lead to a particular set of available interactions presented to a white child. For instance, if a child lives in a predominantly white neighborhood, attends a predominantly white school, and has primarily white peer options, s/he will most likely interact primarily with white adults and children. And, it is through these interactions that children produce knowledge about race—interactions that include cultural routines, talking and language, direct messages and implicit messages too. The core of this diagram then is where the process of interpretive reproduction takes place.

In addition to these circles moving from the largest in to the center, these various dimensions, or concentric circles, are also bidirectional. That is, they also impact one

another in the opposite direction, or through feedback loops. For instance, children's interactions may in turn shape the choices that their parents make about who they can spend time with or what experiences they have. Further, choices about schools and neighborhoods may also shape how parents think about race over time. Therefore, these dimensions of a racial context of childhood shape one other, both from largest concentric circle in to the center circle, as well as from the inside out. This model therefore allows for children's agency and is not deterministic. Children's own perspectives have an impact not only on the outcomes of racial socialization but also on their parent's perspectives. This feedback loop is a crucial component of this model. Even still, this bidirectional model allows us to account for the powerful ways in which choices parents make shape how their kids form ideas about the social world.

My model builds on Bourdieu's idea of "habitus," or the "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1977: 72) that serve as the "objective basis for regular modes of behavior, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice" (Bourdieu 1990: 77). Bourdieu speaks in great detail about how children, through interactions with adults, are like pupils or apprentices, learning their group's place in the world and when to "keep one's distance" (Bourdieu 1977: 82). Bourdieu views childhood as a time period in which the newest members of society are integrated into their particular social location (in his case class, but also, presumably race and gender locations) and come to share a "world-view" with the group to which they belong. Overall, thus, the theory of habitus, informs my own conceptualization of how white children learn about race.

Findings

I find that racial ideology—or a web of beliefs and values which parents use to make sense of the world and to inform their parenting decisions—shapes the white racial socialization of their children. The actual decisions parents make differ in accordance to their ideological position, as does the content of what they offer. However, while the content of these messages may vary, the mechanisms involved in this process remain similar. Parents in this study make a set of choices that serve to construct a particular racial context of childhood. Children then interact within that context, producing their own racial knowledge as a result of their interactions with peers, adults, media, teachers, strangers, and the social world generally. While racial socialization in families of color has been found to often be explicit and intentional, I find that white racial socialization is often implicit, idiosyncratic, and in some cases, unconscious. This is not true across the board in that some white parents in the study approach racial socialization in an explicit and deliberate manner. Nevertheless, even for these parents, much of what their children learn about race is due to the broader racial context in which they are embedded.

Parents who deny the salience of race adhere to colorblind ideological positions, which inform the parenting choices that they make. Parents who accept the notion that race matters in contemporary America adhere to what I call a color-conscious ideological position or narration about race. However, while a number of the families in my study operated with what I call this color-conscious ideological position or narration about race, this did not lead to general consistency *in action* as I found with colorblind families. Rather, I find two very different color-conscious contexts—one defined by parents seeking to cultivate an anti-racist praxis (Perry and Shotwell 2007) in their children while

the other defined by parents participating in what I call "justified avoidance," which has some similarities with and connections to what scholars refer to as "diversity discourse", "shallow multiculturalism", "aversive racism", and "racial apathy" (Anderson 1999; Bell and Hartmann 2007; Dovidio and Gaertner 2000; and Forman 2004). As will be discussed in Part III of this dissertation, it is not always the case that the ideological positions of parents neatly map on to their behaviors. Rather, as I will explore, for this group of parents, the ideas they express about race, in fact, do not seem to match up with the choices they make. This inconsistency will be explored later.

Overall, I find that the practices, processes, and racial meaning-making of white children are tied directly to the racial context in which they are growing up. These contexts differ from one another, are often complex and nuanced, and yet contain important patterns. Understanding white racial socialization, thus, requires an understanding of these dimensions and how they shape one another. Understanding this process also provides insight into the form and structure of white racial socialization— while some white parents engage in more indirect and unintentional practices, other white parents are very direct and deliberate in the messages they provide. As a whole, the following dissertation research unpacks this idea of a racial context of childhood, demonstrating both its theoretical significance as well as how racial contexts operate empirically and differ in meaningful ways. Finally, this study provides a look into how white children in the current moment think about and understand race in America.

Relevance of the Following Research

Understanding how white youth today make sense of racial dynamics is of particular interest given the current sociopolitical moment in which we are experiencing

many demographic and ideological transformations. These transformations include a growing 'minority' majority (Feagin and O'Brien 2003; Krysan and Lewis 2004); contested notions in popular culture about how or when race matters (Bonilla-Silva 2006); and widely divergent ideas among adults about whether racial inequality is even a problem in the USA anymore (Bobo 2001). For example, recent research on adults has found a growing predominance of color-blind racial ideology, a racial common sense that 'explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics' (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 2; see also Frankenburg 1993; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Gallagher 1997; Forman and Lewis 2006; McDermott 2006).

So too have whiteness scholars such as Twine and Gallagher (2008) argued that whiteness ought to be examined as "a multiplicity of identities that are historically grounded, class specific, politically manipulated and gendered social locations that inhabit local custom and national sentiments within the context of the new 'global village'" (6). And in the Annual Review of Sociology (2005), McDermott and Samson write that the "next era of research on white racial and ethnic identity" must negotiate the "long-term staying power of white privilege and the multifarious manifestations of the experience of whiteness" (256).

My study explores this "multifarious" nature of whiteness—are all whites colorblind or anti-racist? What nuances exist in how affluent, highly educated, liberal, progressive whites make sense of race and more specifically, how do these whites teach their children about race in ways that are both conscious and unconscious? Additionally, while research has focused on whites who identify as "anti-racist," what does it mean to consider Perry and Shotwell's (2007) theory of antiracist praxis, which moves away from

traditional notions of anti-racism? And what does it mean for white children that at times, their parents' beliefs about race do not appear to align with their behaviors?

This research also fills a gap in the racial socialization literature in that it addresses white racial socialization; in addition, this work fills a gap in the racism literature in that it focuses on children rather than adults' racial ideas. With respect to the handful of studies that do explore white childhood, this study focuses on middle school children. This research also takes seriously the contributions of the New Sociology of Childhood and empirically explores the *active* role children play in socialization processes. Because the new forms of racism literature assumes that children passively take-up ideas from their parents in a straight-forward fashion, this study uncovers some of the complexities of how young children come to make sense of race, complexities that include theorizing children as social agents.

Because this study takes a qualitative, child-centered approach, it includes all of the benefits of qualitative research in understanding how people make sense of their everyday experiences and interactions. Knowledge gained from this study along with the existing survey data on children's racial attitudes is useful in unveiling how the newest members of society make sense of social inequality. Additionally, this work seeks to amplify children's voices, listen to what they have to say and work toward the goal of advancing the rights of children to be heard and taken seriously by adult researchers. In particular, this study strives to live up to Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "the right to be heard." This study also explores new models of socialization that take into account children's agency and take seriously the model of interpretive reproduction, moving away from straight-forward deterministic socialization models.

Scholarship that reveals the relationship between children's experiences and parents' racial socialization behaviors is important, and as Hughes and Johnson (2001) argue, "building a knowledge base regarding children's contributions to shaping racial socialization" is a direction scholarship ought to take.

Finally, given the vast racial disparities in the United States, understanding the processes that shape how the newest generation develops their racial subjectivities is important if we wish to understand more fully how racial inequality is maintained. While this study examines specifically, the processes of white racial socialization in the home and how racially-privileged (and class-privileged) kids understand race, an area of inquiry with little empirical data currently available, this study also provides more information on how kids in general understand race—as well as how one's own race shapes understandings of race and inequality more broadly. Because whites occupy dominant positions within social institutions and because racial ideologies 'justify or challenge the racial status quo' (Bonilla-Silva 2006: 11-12), understanding how these young whites develop racial commonsense—and what that knowledge constitutes—is important in terms of transforming or cultivating these ideas in ways that lead to actions that promote racial equity.

In this study, I reveal how white children, living in the Post-Civil rights era and living in affluent families, create and reproduce racial common sense knowledge as a result of interactions that occur within the racial context of childhood designed by their parents and in which they are embedded.

CHAPTER 2: Methods

"Ethnography…does not seek to represent social 'things in themselves'…but things as they are grasped and shaped through the meaning-conferring response of members. Ethnographic descriptions of the social world, therefore, must identify and convey the meanings that actions and events have for actors in that world" (Emerson 2001: 30).

Studying processes of racial socialization involves both identifying and interpreting the meanings white children attach to race as well as understanding how these meanings are produced. Given that scholars studying white racial subjects in recent years have often found them to experience and discuss race in ways that are often contradictory and elusive, ethnography is particularly useful method for exploring how race is discussed and lived. As Lewis (2004: 637) argues:

'Ethnographic work remains a potentially fruitful strategy in that it allows us not only to examine what people say in more depth but to examine what they actually do in their daily lives…. Especially today when racial thinking and behavior remains pervasive but operates in much more covert ways, ethnographic work in white settings, on the "everydayness" of whiteness is essential.'

In this project I draw on ethnographic methods to access the "'everydayness' of whiteness" and the "distinctive interpretations of reality" of white children and the adults in their lives (Emerson 2001, 30). From January 2011 to December 2012, I conducted an ethnographic study of white racial socialization in a Midwestern metropolitan area with the goal of identifying the role the family plays in the construction of children's commonsense racial knowledge. My research consists of: (1) ethnographic fieldwork, inclusive of extensive observations of white families in their daily lives and extensive participant observation in the larger community; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with white families, including parents and their middle school aged children; and (3) content analysis of relevant documents, such as local newspaper articles, parent blog

posts and other printed materials distributed within the community relating to white children and race. Using multiple empirical tools allowed me to gain insight into how white racial socialization works from various perspectives. Similar to the work of Hughey (2012) and Lewis (2003), this "triangulated" approach to data and methods allowed me to access a variety of vantage points. While I interviewed and observed both adults and children in this ethnographic study, I consciously worked to access the perspective of the child participants. To do this I relied on innovative child-centered research methods, a goal of critical youth scholarship and the new sociology of childhood (Best 2008; Christensen & James 2008; Corsaro 2011).[2]

Why upper-middle-class families?

Because of the limitations of time and other resources I decided to focus on 30 families from three different communities. So not to have too many dimensions of variation within the families, I focused specifically on upper middle class families. I selected to focus on these families with class privilege as they have the ability to more easily shape their lives as they desire. As I was most interested in the kinds of choices parents make, I opted to study families who were mostly likely to be able to act on their desires – the ability for white parents to realize their preferences is governed by their fundamental access to economic and cultural resources (Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Lamont, 1992). Upper middle class families have the ability to make choices about schools, neighborhoods, peer interactions, travel, etc.. Their resources can take various forms, but most importantly, the possession of white upper middle class educational,

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[2] Children as a social group have not received the same "detailed considerations" as studies of other social groups have, despite the fact that enormous amounts of literature focus on institutions in which children find themselves such as schools (Best, 2008: 5).

economic, social, and cultural capital allows for the construction of a context of childhood to be a result of active, deliberate choices made by parents who are weighing all other options.. Further, I opted focus on these families as very little past research has examined race and class privilege together, especially not with respect to children growing up in families with these forms of social and cultural capital.

Class scholars have long debated how to measure and define social class (Grusky and Sorenson 1998). For example, some theorists argue that property holdings is the best way to measure class (Giddens, 1973) while other scholars argue that occupation and various kinds of skills ought to define these categories (Wright 1984). Blau and Duncan (1967) posit that occupation should be thought of in terms of status and prestige and that occupational rankings along a prestige hierarchy are linked to income, education, expenditures, intelligence levels, politics and residential locations. Finally, Hauser and Warren (1997) offer the use of education, income and occupational standing as their preferred method.

Although very little research has been conducted with the upper-middle-class portion of the American population, sociologists interested in class privilege have defined this class position in a variety of ways. On the one hand, sociologists have drawn on measures of income, occupation, and education. For instance, classical theorist Max Weber refers to this group as *well-educated professionals* with comfortable *incomes* (1978). Lamont's (1992) study of upper middle class men in France and the United States uses *college education* as a measure of membership in this class. Lareau (2003) measures social class by evaluating the *type of employment* held by parents participating in her study (2003: 261).

On the other hand, Oliver and Shapiro (2006) and Johnson (2006) argue for the importance of including wealth indicators such as home ownership when measuring class privilege. Wealth assets, they argue, as opposed to household income, are what provide families with the greatest ability to make strategic choices about housing and schooling (Johnson 2006):

> More often [wealth] is used to create opportunities, secure a desire stature and a standard of living, or pass class status along to one's children. In this sense, the command over resources that wealth entails is more encompassing than is income or education, and closer in meaning and theoretical significant to our traditional notions of economic wellbeing and access to life chances (Johnson 2006: 2).

Oliver and Shapiro have identified home ownership as one of the "primary mechanisms for generating wealth" and "the single most important means of accumulating assets." (2006: 9). Gilbert (2002) also offers a definition of upper-middle-class that includes an income of over $70,000 as well as college education, professional occupation, and ownership or the ability to own, cars, homes and other symbolic representations of success.

In this study, I draw on these various definitions used by other scholars and define families with upper-middle-class status as those in which at least one parent (1) holds a graduate or professional degree, (2) has a career as a lawyer, medical doctor, engineer, university professor, business CEO/manager, scientific researcher, or similar occupation, and (3) owns a home. I think these measures accurately define families with upper-middle class status as occupation and education have often been used to measure class and because I agree that wealth assets matter in the lives of families and the choices they can make. I change Lamont's notion of college-education as a measure of upper middle class status to holding a graduate or professional degree instead because I want to discern between the middle class and the upper middle class. In her family-based research,

Lareau (2003) defines middle class as having college-level skills; I want to be sure I am studying families who have more options than those in the middle class, which is why I include professional degrees rather than bachelor's degrees. Thus, the families in my study have the economic resources (prestigious occupations with high incomes that require the highest levels of education), important wealth holdings (like private property, investments and inheritances) and the cultural and social capital (such as networks, tastes, rituals, styles of life) that allow them to make all kinds of choices about how to live their lives. In other words, these families have upper-middle-class status, or can be considered to be "affluent." Qualitatively speaking, these families have command over their lives in economic terms: they have disposable income; they take trips around the world for leisure to places like South Africa, China, England, Argentina, and France; they donate large quantities of money to organizations they support such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and political parties campaigns; they have material possessions that are costly such as large single family homes in expensive neighborhoods ranging from $350,000 to more than a million dollars; they spend a great deal of their resources on private schooling or extracurricular activities for their children like Chinese language lessons, horseback riding, and skiing; they hold professional jobs with high incomes upwards of $500,000 per year in at least one case, and they have degrees of the highest nature from some of the most exclusive institutions in the world like Harvard Law School, John Hopkins Medical School, University of Chicago, and the London School of Economics.

Race of Participants

Aside from a handful of people of color who provided me with "informant" interviews, all of the participants in my study racially identify as white when asked. I did

not interview mixed race families in my sample. While the ethnic identification of these white families varies considerably including "German", "Italian", "Irish" etc., they all indicated to me that they identify as "white" or "Caucasian" or "light-skinned" or "European Americans."

Why middle-school aged children?

I decided to focus this study on children in the latter half of the developmental period known as middle childhood, or ages ten to twelve. Middle childhood is a developmental stage in which moral principles such as "justice, fairness, compassionate caring, and feelings of responsibility for one's fellow human beings" emerge (Hughes 2002). This developmental stage is also when children can mentally conceptualize "ideologies, beliefs, and values" (Damon & Hart 1988) and are in the midst of developing a social and ideological perspective of the world (Meece 2002). Thus, middle childhood is a crucial developmental stage for the formation of racial ideologies. I also wanted to interview children and parents who were in the midst of middle childhood rather than conduct retrospective research in which people reflect back on this stage of their lives. Given these rationales, I selected this age and developmental period (McNamee & Seymour 2012).

IRB Process

Researchers studying children often cite the IRB process as a major roadblock to gathering information directly from children about their everyday lives including how they think about and make sense of the world around them. While I did not have too much difficulty receiving permission to conduct this research, I actively sought to

construct an IRB application that paid particular attention to the power dynamics implicated in an adult-research and child-participant interview model.

When conducting research with children, based on the age of the child participant, a different assent/consent process may, and in this case did, apply. Because I planned to interview children who ranged in age from 9 to 14, I had to create two separate assent/consent forms. While children between the ages of 9 to 11 did not have the option to assent themselves, rather their parents provided their consent, children between the ages of 11 and 14 completed an assent form for themselves in addition to the parental consent form. I wrote the child-assent form in language that was child-friendly, asking a child within the age range to look over an early draft of the document. In my IRB proposal, I included a discussion of why these elements of the child assent form were so important to safeguarding against the possibility of a child feeling unwanted pressure to participate in my project but also to establish rapport with the kids from the onset of the interview process. I also discussed the importance of child-centered research methods (Best 2008; Christensen & James 2008; Corsaro 2011; Hagerman 2010).

Selecting a Research Site

In selecting a site to conduct this research, I wanted to identify a place where a sizable number of affluent families lived. Therefore, I sought out a place with many professional managerial jobs, and where many possible choices of neighborhoods and schools were available.

I also wanted to identify a city that was large enough for these jobs and choices to be present but not so big that people living in different areas of the city had no sense of the other areas. I wanted to find a place where members of the city as a whole shared a

sense of the social geography. I also wanted to locate a city that had some diversity in racial composition within it, but also some areas that were predominantly white.

Inductive Process of Neighborhood Selection

Given these criteria, I selected a medium-sized Midwestern metropolitan area which I will refer to as Petersfield as my research site. I knew that the suburbs surrounding the city were almost exclusively white with presumably limited interracial interaction on the part of people who lived there, whereas the city was a more racially diverse space, though still residentially segregated. I also knew that a sizable upper-middle-class population lived in the Petersfield area due to various industries, a major university, and government-related activities. Finally, members of this community as a whole occupy political positions at both extreme ends of the political spectrum, which I thought would be another type of diversity that would be useful to have present in my study.

With respect to population demographics, Petersfield is a medium-sized city with a population of 200,000 within the city limits and a population of 500,000 in the county as a whole. In terms of racial demographics, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, Petersfield is 78.9% White alone, 7.3% Black, 7.4% Asian, and 6.8% Latino. In comparison, Sheridan, a nearby suburb that is part of my study, is almost 96% white, with 1.0% Black, 1.2% Asian and 2.2% Latino.

Race	Petersfield	Sheridan
White alone	75.7	94.3
Black alone	7.3	1.0
American Indian	0.4	0.2
Asian alone	7.4	1.2
Two or more races	2.1	1.3
Latino	6.8	2.2

Table 1. Racial groups by percent in city and suburb from 2010 Census

After moving to this city, I spent approximately three months figuring out the lay of the land. Through an inductive process in which I spent most of my time in public places talking to strangers and building relationships, I was able to identify different communities within Petersfield County that were literally and symbolically distinct. Rather than entering the field with preconceived notions about what I would find, I selected the neighborhoods of Sheridan, Evergreen, and Wheaton Hills through "theoretical sampling, that is, sampling for theory construction, not for representativeness of a given population (Charmaz 1995). When drawing what is known as grounded theory, as Charmaz (1995) describes:

> …you start with individual cases, incidents or experiences and develop progressively more abstract conceptual categories to synthesize, to explain and to understand your data and to identify patterned relationships within it (335).

After three months of collecting preliminary data that I used to figure out where different groups of whites lives, I then selected two affluent neighborhoods within the city and one suburban community to focus my recruitment on. I chose these neighborhoods because they represent three of the most expensive and most socially desirable places to live within Petersfield County. Of note, before entering the field, I proposed sampling from a different suburb than the one I ultimately included in my study. As I learned more about how people constructed local meanings around place and race, however, the suburb I ended up including emerged as a better comparison group during the middle stages of my data collection process. This element of my dissertation process is a further evidence of the utility of grounded theory, or the idea that "simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis means that the researcher's emerging analysis shapes his or her data collection procedures…[this] fosters his or her taking control of the data…and [leads] the researcher subsequently to collect more data around emerging themes and questions" (Charmaz, 1995, 336).

Because I wanted to ensure that I was interviewing families that fit into my definition of "white upper middle class status," I also cross-checked these neighborhoods with publically available data such as housing values, Census block information about racial composition, and newspaper stories about people living in these communities and what they do socially/politically/ occupationally to confirm that they met the criteria I established. Thus, with respect to class, the median household income in this county is around $60,000, which is approximately $10,000 higher than the state and national average. Within the city, median household income is around $51,000 with a 17% poverty rate whereas in the suburb, the median household income is $80,166 with a 2%

poverty rate (See Figure 1). Thus, the suburb is not only whiter, but the people living

there also have higher incomes. Within the city, $217,500 was the median property value

compared to $307,500 in the suburb; both places have a median owned-property value

that is much higher than the state average, which is closer to $170,000. Within the city of

Petersfield, homes in Wheaton Hills range from between $300,000 to 1.5 million, the

median property being roughly $400,000 while homes in Evergreen range between

$260,000 and $600,000, the average being roughly $350,000.[3]

Sampling of Families

In order to find families to interview, I drew upon a snowball sampling method.

Once I identified a few families who lived in each of the communities I identified as

theoretically important, I asked them if they would be willing to refer me to their

neighbors and they did so. I typically contacted families via email, though in some cases,

respondents themselves would send an email out to friends asking them to contact me if

they were open to participating.

Aside from just selecting specific families within the neighborhoods to

participate, I also engaged in extensive participant observation in all three communities.

Within these three places of Sheridan, Evergreen and Wheaton Hills, I collected a mass

of ethnographic data ranging from experiences I had within private spaces to which I was

granted access such as country clubs and play dates to observations in public spaces like

parks and recreational facilities. Of course I also collected ethnographic data throughout

the city as well, particularly in the downtown area where most restaurants, shops and

cafes are located in this community. Overall, I interviewed parents and children of 10

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[3] These values are based on estimates of average homes in neighborhoods on the website Zillow.

families in each of the three neighborhoods resulting in a sample size of 65 structured

family interviews as some families had multiple middle school aged children, or two

parents were interviewed.

Gaining Entrée

In order to describe and interpret the everyday meanings of race in the lives of

white affluent kids and their parents, I immersed myself as an actor into a community that

was both white and affluent. Cassell (1980) states, "The interaction is the method; the

ethnographer is the research instrument" (36). As Cassell puts it, I thought of myself as a

research instrument, appreciating from the onset that it would be my interactions with

members of this community that would help me generate my data. "The role assumed by

the observer largely determines where [s]he can go, what [s]he can do, whom [s]he can

interact with, what [s]he can inquire about, what [s]he can see and what s[he] can be told"

(McCall and Simmons 1969, 29). With this advice in mind, I approached my research site

prepared to interact with as many white, affluent families as I could.

In order to meet people in Petersfield, I purposefully joined the upscale gym

located in the downtown part of the city, where I assumed many professionals exercised.

This gym also had a yoga studio attached, which in the past was one avenue through

which I have made friends after moving to new cities. After about ten minutes of

friendly, enthusiastic chit-chat with the gym salesperson on the phone, I was invited to

attend a "Ladies Night" at the gym, which consisted of a one-hour yoga class, followed

by margaritas and nachos at a nearby restaurant. By attending this event and making

connections with the other women in attendance, I secured an informant interview with a

teacher and an additional interview one with a mom who had a middle school aged son. I

also was given the contact information for two other mothers who appeared to potentially meet the criteria for my study: white, affluent, middle school aged kids, living in one of three areas of the broad community. I sold myself as both an "insider" (white, interested in yoga, attending a prestigious university) as well as an outsider (knowing "nothing" about the community, asking them for their explanations of various dynamics and observations). I always talked about my work in this initial recruitment stage as "a project on how parents talk to their kids about social issues" or a project on "families with middle school kids" rather than using the word "race" upfront for fear that they may not be willing to participate based on the controversial nature of race relations in America.

The following week, I had my first interview at a coffee shop in the suburb with one of the women I met at the gym event. This very first interview led to contact information for other families living in the suburban area, though I struggled to get these other families to participate in my project, once they knew it was about race. Families in Sheridan (the suburb) were extremely cautious and resistant to participating in my research project. I quickly realized that I was going to need to do much more than go to one event if I was going to find affluent, white families who would let me come into their home to ask them questions about a potentially controversial and politically charged topic. I figured the best way to do this was to connect myself with a family in the community. Fortunately, I had an acquaintance who lived in this city and had children in middle school. Through cultivating a friendship with her over time, she began to invite me to her children's sporting events, school plays, and even just to hang out with her family random weeknights while the kids were doing homework. My relationship with this person eventually lead to her connecting me with multiple families in the Evergreen

neighborhood. This one friend became the starting point for my Evergreen snowball, which grew very quickly. Unlike the families in the suburban context, families living in Evergreen were readily open to participating in my research, many of them professors at the local university or teachers in public schools who cared deeply about my research topic, or what they perceived my research topic really was. Consequently, I was able to conduct all the interviews in Evergreen within the first 6 months of living in this community. A few others cropped up much later on in my study, which was helpful because I knew much more about the community by the end of the data collection period. However, the bulk of my first interviews came from parents and children in Evergreen.

As a strategy for recruiting families in Wheaton Hills, I got a babysitting job in the neighborhood. I needed to find a family that was on board with my study with parents who would be willing to help me find other families to participate through their social networks. Using the job-board affiliated with the local university, along with my resume of being a past high school teacher, program coordinator for a summer middle school program, and having a knowledge of child development, I was able to find a family that met these criteria with very little effort. In fact, I only went on one job interview and knew straight away that I had found the right family. The mother in this family was extremely social and had a wide social network. She simply sent an email to a list of about twenty families with a description I provided her of my project. Interested families then emailed me directly, and I arranged interviews. Approximately five of these families expressed interest, and through these families, I was connected with even more families. In time, I was able to locate people in all three neighborhoods, which is ultimately what allowed me to proceed with my research. Though I struggled to find willing participants

in the suburban community, I eventually met a family in Wheaton Hills with multiple connections to families in Sheridan, which is what allowed me to ask have the third group of comparison in my study. Without tapping into the social networks of people I met and without being outgoing, patient, and persistent, it would have been virtually impossible to conduct this research project.

Descriptive Details of Setting and Families

Settings

While the city of Petersfield is known as a liberal, historic, diverse, college city as well as a hub for state politics and business, the almost 99% white, affluent nearby suburb of Sheridan is commonly understood as being very conservative, very white, and very wealthy. People in Sheridan refer to Petersfield as "out of touch" and "surrounded by reality" speaking to the dramatic differences in political climate of the two places. Miles of farmland and only one major road separate these two places, creating a clear and distinct boundary between the two locations. Sheridan's higher housing values and much higher median household and family incomes alongside its almost entirely white population make it stand out as contextually-different, even at first glace, compared to Petersfield. Thus, Petersfield and Sheridan are considered to be very different kinds of places filled with very different kinds of people, members of each place viewing members of the other with a degree of disdain. Despite their differences though, both of these places have secured high rankings according to recent lists such as "Top Places to Live" and "Best Places to Live in America." And both of these places are homes to white, upper middle class, middle school aged children and their families.

All of the families in my study have at least one (and in 75% of my sample, two) parent(s) with a career as a professional including professors, and in most cases a natural sciences research-focused professor; medical doctors; lawyers, either working for the state or private practice; non-lawyers with careers in state politics, including holding office; or business executives. Accordingly, the education levels of these parents are quite high with every child in my sample having at least one parent and often two parents with a PhD, MD, JD or MBA. All of the children in my study have a parent(s) who owns a home, and in most cases, these homes are some of the most expensive properties in their community and are located in highly desirable locations. As 12-year old Kacie told me, she lives "where the fortunate people live." Property values within the three neighborhoods from which I sampled range from $300,000 – $3.7 million, though I did not gather data about the specific home values of study participants.

The two neighborhoods I selected within the city of Petersfield are Wheaton Hills and Evergreen. These neighborhoods are predominantly-white, with less than 1% of the population within each census tract non-white. Although these neighborhoods themselves are predominantly white, and despite the city's high rates of residential segregation in general, the public schools in Wheaton Hills and Evergreen are racially integrated (see Table 1) due to an established busing system put into place in the 1980s. However, many of the private schools in the city, such as the TAG School and Saint Anne's, are considerably whiter. Like many suburbs in America, Sheridan is almost 100% white, both with respect to the suburb as a whole as well as the public schools (Massey and Denton 1993, Oliver and Shapiro 1995, Johnson 2006). I will describe these three neighborhoods at length later in this dissertation.

	Evergreen MS (Public-City)	**Wheaton Hills MS** (Public-City)	**TAG School** (Private - City)	**Saint Anne's** (Private-City)	**Sheridan MS** (Public-Suburb)
White	55	62	80	95	98.8
Black	23	7	3	.4	.01
Latino	12	9	3	.5	.01
Asian	3	16	13	3	1
More than 1 race	7	6	1	1	.01

Table 2. Racial composition of middle schools

Families

Through snowball sampling, I interviewed parents and children from 30 families: 10 families in Evergreen, 10 families in Wheaton Hills and 10 families in Sheridan for a total of 65 in-depth interviews with kids and parents. I also conducted 10 additional informant interviews with teachers, parents of Black and Asian children, high school students who had grown up in this community of various races, and other local members of the community.

Most parents I interviewed were between the ages of 35-50, as reported to me during interviews, and most were women though I did interview 7 men.[4] Gender representation of the children was a relatively equal split between (14) girls and (16) boys. The children ranged in school age including five 5th graders, ten 6th graders, eight 7th graders, and seven 8th graders.

[4] Given still persistent gendered divisions in household labor, and similar to other studies, most of the parents who participated in interviews were mothers (Lewis 2003, Lareau 2003). I interviewed ten fathers. In seven families, I interviewed both parents. Here, parents generally shared similar views, which helped allay fears that interviewing only mothers would distort findings.

Child	Age	Gender	School
Natalie Schultz	11	Girl	Saint Anne's, now Sheridan Middle
Erica Schultz	13	Girl	Saint Anne's, now Sheridan Middle
Jacob Avery	11	Boy	Sheridan Middle
Lauren Avery	12	Girl	Sheridan Middle
Meredith Chablis	12	Girl	Sheridan Middle
Jamie Younker	10	Girl	Saint Anne's
Kelsey Younker	13	Girl	Saint Anne's
Britney Smith	11	Girl	Sheridan Middle
Nate Reed	12	Boy	Sheridan Middle
Ryan Morris	11	Boy	Sheridan Middle
Charlotte Robinson	12	Girl	Saint Anne's
Alex Church	10	Boy	Saint Anne's
Jessica Boone	11	Girl	Saint Anne's
Chris Hayes	11	Boy	TAG School
Rosie Stewart	10	Girl	Saint Anne's
Darren Palmer-Ross	10	Boy	Saint Anne's, then Wheaton Hills Middle
Robert Norbrook	12	Boy	Wheaton Hills Middle
Lindsay Kerner	11	Girl	TAG
Evan Buseman	11	Boy	Wheaton Hills Middle
Logan Wells	13	Boy	Wheaton Hills Middle
Kacie Martin	12	Girl	Saint Anne's and Wheaton Hills Middle
Lucy Hanson	10	Girl	Wheaton Hills Middle
Conor Norton-Smith	11	Boy	Evergreen Middle
Anthony Hall	12	Boy	Evergreen Middle
Ben Silber	12	Boy	Evergreen Middle
Sam Anderson	10	Boy	TAG School
William Green	12	Boy	Evergreen Middle
Cara Lacey	13	Girl	Evergreen Middle
Ashley Carter	10	Girl	Evergreen Middle
Margot Patterson	12	Girl	Evergreen Middle
Mark Patterson	10	Boy	Evergreen Middle
Caroline Parker	13	Girl	Evergreen Middle

Table 3. Children, Age, Gender, and School

Kids' Lives

All of the children in the study participated in a host of extracurricular activities,

ranging from high-level athletics to top-ranked science and technology teams to

competitive horseback riding. All of these children traveled a great deal with their parents

to places in the United States such as Washington D.C. for the presidential inauguration

to vacation homes their parents own in Aspen or on Nantucket. These kids also travel

internationally to places including Mozambique, Peru, Israel, South Africa, China, and

most commonly, throughout Western Europe. These kids also travel to major US cities

quite frequently to participate in educational enrichment programs, as well as to perform

in elite groups based around the arts, particularly dance and music.

Across the board, parents and in some cases children, living within the city limits

identify as some form of "social progressive" or "liberal" or "Democrat" or "radical"

when asked about political identity. However, in Sheridan all of the respondents with the

exception of one identified as "conservative" or "Republican." When I asked the

politically right-leaning respondents how they would classify the county as a whole, they

articulated the belief that their community as a whole was "very liberal" and that they and

their conservative friends were the outliers. Generally speaking, the white community at

large that I chose for this project is residentially segregated in terms of race, class and

along political party lines, a somewhat new trend in America according to political

scientist Bishop (2008).

Participant Observation

In order to facilitate the collection of my ethnographic data, I spent significant

amounts of time in public places observing the interactions, behaviors and language of

white families. In some cases, I had previously interviewed the families while in other

cases the families were unknown to me. Over the data collection period, I witnessed

numerous examples of white children receiving and reacting to subtle and overt messages about race while in public places.

The kinds of public places I observed were those that I hypothesized (and then later confirmed through the networks I built while living in this community) were places where white families with high amounts disposable income and middle school aged children may spend time. Thus, I focused on public parks and family-friendly establishments within walking distance from the neighborhoods and parts of town within which I was interested in interviewing residents. I spent time observing middle school aged children as well as white, affluent parents in all kinds of public places including the following: the mall; parks; restaurants (both family friendly ones as well as more upscale spots where parents of the demographic I was interested in studying go for reprieve from their children); grocery stores; farmer's markets; street festivals; local political protests; parades; art gallery openings; theatre performances; parking garages downtown; playgrounds; streets in town with a cluster of shopping and restaurants; cafes; the public library; the public ice skating pond; various museums, especially the Children's Museum; local arts and crafts activities run by local businesses for kids; local community artist studio; book readings; and public pools in the neighborhoods I was interested in studying.

The public places where I made the most observations though were unknown to me until I started speaking to actual children living in this community. For instance, it was only randomly that I discovered that the local ice cream shop, no matter what the season, was a big hangout spot for the kids attending the local private school as well as the local public school. In some ways, this ice cream shop was a space for all kinds of peer interactions and social mixing. I only discovered this when my friend's son asked

me to take him there one day after I picked him up from school. What was especially interesting about this space was the racial dynamic between the white, affluent private school kids who were released from school slightly earlier than the public school kids, and the racially mixed crowd of white, Asian, black and Latino public school kids who then joined the ice cream shop later. The racial and class dynamics in the ice cream shop could truly have been an ethnographic study all on its own.

Hence, I spent 24 months typing short-hand field notes and reminder messages about things I noticed into my iPhone so I wouldn't forget them when I wrote up proper field notes later. As such, I found myself typing messages to myself on Saturday mornings in the checkout line at the grocery store after eavesdropping on a young girl arguing with her father about what race Rihanna is based on the cover of US Weekly in the magazine stand. Or, I found myself trying to discreetly type up a note to myself about a fight between a white woman and black woman in line at an art museum in which race and place were evoked. Each night, I typed up formal field notes reflecting what I had observed that day. Some days, of course, I did not notice anything of particular interest, while other days were incredibly rich and required much time and description. Generally speaking, by spending such an extended period of time in public places, listening to conversations, talking to strangers, and attending all of the kinds of events I guessed white affluent members of the community would attend, I was able to gather an overwhelming amount of rich, qualitative data about the people living in this place, and especially about middle school aged kids, their parents and messages about race. These observations in the community also allowed me to acquire a sense of the larger social geography of race and the cultural milieu of the Petersfield metropolitan area.

Public places were not the only places in which I gathered my data. I was also able to successfully form relationships with families and teachers that provided me access to the private places where affluent kids spend a lot of time. Through these relationships, I was also able to access spaces that are designated for children and authorized adults, such as schools. Because affluent children spend so much time in private spaces, the observations I made in these places were especially important for my research. Examples of these kinds of spaces and activities include the following: hanging out with kids and professional parents during afterschool (day care) pickup at the local private middle school, sitting on the sidelines of private club soccer games with parents who introduce me to other parents, managing the incredibly hectic and dangerous parking lot of a private school at the end of the school day and mingling with other parents as I do so; spending the day at the country club pool and tennis courts; driving children to various extracurricular activities and picking up their friends along the way (very interesting conversations take place between middle school kids in the backseats of their babysitter's car); attending performances of kids' plays and band concerts (especially interesting because the parents all interact while their children are up on stage); sitting through countless sporting events [including: soccer, football, hockey, ballet, ice-skating, horseback riding, tennis, swimming, track, volleyball, baseball, basketball, water ballet, yoga, and gymnastics]; driving a carload of kids out into the farmland for summer day camp; hanging out with the Boy Scout and Hockey practice fathers while they watch their sons play laser tag or hockey; and chatting with the soccer moms on the sidelines of the soccer field.

In addition to these examples, I also spent a lot of informal time in the homes of the families I studied. I witnessed a great deal of video game playing, television watching, eating with kids, play dates, phone calls with peers, drama about friendships, birthday parties, homework time, and most of all, just hanging out with middle school aged kids. Most of these more personal in-home experiences were with children with whom I formed relationships, either as a friend of the family, as their babysitter, or through the process of asking if I could observe a home for a few hours following an interview session. Because children talk about race sometimes in very spontaneous, unpredictable moments, spending a great deal of time with the same children was a key element in my ethnography. In addition, as my dissertation will go on to discuss in later chapters, many of these white kids have been taught already that even talking about race in any form is bad and in fact, "racist." Thus, having the luxury of developing meaningful relationships with kids in which trust and understanding can be built as well as being able to enter these private, relaxed spaces in the home where children seemingly were the most honest about their ideas and thoughts when I interviewed them was also a critical element of my project.

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

The second empirical tool I used in this study was semi-structured, in-depth interviews with members of white families, including parents and children. Before beginning my interviewing process, I developed two interview schedules—one for the kids and one for the adults. I pretested this interview schedule on two different kids and three different adults. I asked both children and parents to help me think of better ways to ask certain questions so that the child would understand, and as a way of including

children in the research design process, something often discussed as a way to minimize misunderstanding and allow me to access kids' culture (Best 2008). Overall, my pilot work helped me make decisions about how to improve my questions and make them more child-centered, which I did given the feedback from the pilot respondents.

Critical youth studies call for methods that are innovative and lead to accurate depictions of children's viewpoints rather than adult memories of what it was like to be a child (Biklen 2007) nor adult-centered perspectives that fail to account for power dynamics between children and adults, or studies that fail to include kids' voices altogether. In an attempt to include children in the research process from the very beginning, I sought the help of kids within the appropriate age range in developing an activity in which I compiled photos of popular celebrities of different races that I could use as part of my interview. The kids helped me come up with a list of popular celebrities as well as find photos that represented them in ways that would be familiar to other middle school kids. Celebrities included Justin Bieber, Rihanna, Tiger Woods, Sasha and Malia Obama, Taylor Swift, among others. I used these images to spark discussions about race in a way that was fun and felt safe to the children. I also emphasized that I "didn't know who many of these people are" when conducting the interview, thereby putting the child in a position of authority. Not all of the children in my sample cared about celebrity culture, but most of them expressed amusement during this exercise and every one of them knew most of the celebrities I presented. While this activity will be examined in close detail later in this dissertation, overall, it produced fruitful results.

Child-interviews

As I have discussed, underlying much of my methodological approach is a goal of being "child-centered," or deliberately using research methods that privilege the child's vantage point, amplify the child's voice, and acknowledge the agency of young people (Corsaro 2011). Drawing on techniques outlined in various methodological texts such as Best (2008), Holmes (1998), Waksler (1991), Fraser et al (2004), and my own research (Hagerman 2010), I established rapport with the children by talking to them about topics that mattered to them, by making them feel like they were the experts rather than me, by reinforcing the point that I was not testing them or that there was a "right" answer to my questions, and by connecting with them in ways that made the interview process fun and interesting to them. I used images of their demographics' favorite celebrities as a way of encouraging children to talk about race without having to talk about people in their real life, I asked them questions in terms that I thought they would understand, I encouraged them to ask me questions throughout the process, and I repeated their language back to them rather than insisting on using sociological jargon. I also encouraged the children to laugh, as well as to be serious, and I was always careful not to push them to answer questions that appeared to make them feel uncomfortable.

I approached interviews with children using all the child-centered techniques of which I was aware (Hagerman 2010). I was as friendly and non-threatening as possible. I tried to talk to the kids about current events or other topics that showed interest in before the interview even began. Typically, I interviewed the child after I interviewed the parent, so I usually had some sense of what the child's interests were. In other cases, I interviewed the child first, but I quickly figured out topics to discuss. A few children

were very shy but the majority of them appeared to be very comfortable and reported enjoying the experience.

Child interviews generally lasted between 30-60 minutes. I usually conducted these interviews at the child's home in the living or dining room. Occasionally, I interviewed children at a coffee shop or restaurant. I always tried to conduct interviews in the home of the child not only to make the child more comfortable but also because I was always very interested in what the home was like of the participating family. Following each interview, I would jot quick field notes about the home, what I saw in the home, and any interesting interactions I had while in that private space.

The children all seemed to enjoy looking at the celebrities and thinking about what race they were. This will be discussed at length later in this dissertation, but this celebrity activity was ultimately a great way to spark ideas in children's minds about what race really is or what it really means—this was crucial given that many of the children had not spent much time thinking about it prior to my interviewing them—another piece of data that will be elaborated upon further at a later point in this dissertation. Findings also emerged from the use of the celebrity activity about children's discomfort even talking about the race of someone. Multiple children told me it was "racist" to talk about the race of the people—that to say that Kobe Bryant was "Black" or "African American" was an act of racism. I was not expecting this reaction to the exercise when I developed it, but I believe that this finding provides great evidence of children's agency, children's perspectives and ultimately my creation of a space in which kids felt comfortable challenging me despite my authority as interviewer, a matter highly discussed in the literature on child-centered research (Best 2010).

I always made sure to cover the same topics with the children during my interviews with them, but more so than with the parent interviews, the child interviews tended to vary more in terms of the order of how different topics emerged. I also used slightly different language when I asked the questions across interviews, but generally speaking, I inquired about the same topics. I did a lot of probing of answers, and I paid very close attention to nonverbal behavior and body language. I made sure to never push a child too far into an uncomfortable position, though I also did not avoid pushing children slightly to answer questions they perhaps were uncertain about—I did this by reminding them that there is no right or wrong answer and that I'm not trying to quiz them. The most prevalent comment that children gave me when I said this was that they were "afraid of being a racist"—that they were worried about speaking what they really thought for fear of me thinking that they were racist. Again, this theme of fear of being a racist will be elaborated upon at great length later, though it is important to mention here in the context of research methods. I worked very hard to balance my research agenda with the sometimes-observable unease of the child in particular moments in order to be responsible and ethical as a researcher.

Overall, the child interviews were richly informative and I believe offered the children an opportunity to voice their opinions in a safe space. In many cases in which I saw the children at a later date, the kids asked me about my project and told me they had fun talking to me, which is important given my slight concern about asking kids to talk about a sometimes uncomfortable topic.

Parent-interviews

I also conducted more traditional, semi-structured interviews with the parents of the children in the sample. Though I originally intended to conduct multiple interviews with the parents in an attempt to both build rapport and be more in-depth, I found that I was unsuccessful in this attempt; these parents felt overwhelmed by the thought of even one interview and would in some cases refuse to participate altogether when they found out I wanted to speak to them on two separate occasion. Consequently, I decided to do longer interviews in one sitting rather than the ideal of two separate interviews. In fact, scheduling the interviews was one of the greatest challenges I faced, especially given the busy schedules of the families in my sample.

Interviews with parents lasted longer than the ones with their children, typically, as most interviews ranged between 75-90 minutes. When I interviewed two parents at once, the interview time doubled, though in some ways, the banter back and forth between the two parents was incredibly informative, particularly when they argued or challenged each other. These interviews also tended to take place in the family home, though occasionally I was invited to their work office or a restaurant to conduct the interview. In at least five cases, the parents contacted me with additional comments or questions regarding my project following the interview.

I worked hard to maintain the confidentiality of my respondents, though some people knew who I interviewed as a result of my snowball sampling technique. I never discussed the interviews of other participants, and perhaps the most challenging moment in my attempt to maintain confidentiality was when parents asked what their children told me. In one case, a parent actually requested that I send her the digital audio file of the interview with her son since she knew I had digitally recorded it. She understood when I

explained how I felt that violated the confidentiality agreement I had established with her

son, but this presented interesting ethical concerns about the extent of parental consent.

Never, however, did the children ask me what their parents said in response to my

questions, perhaps evidence of the power differentials between children and adults.

Content Analysis

Another aspect to my ethnography was observing the messages broadly connected

to my study found in various forms of locally produced print. Every day for the first year

of data collection (and despite how much I personally disliked the publication,) I read the

local newspaper cover-to-cover. Articles about the racial achievement gap in the city's

schools, editorials about the racial disparities in the local juvenile justice system, and

features on people who ended up being part of my study were the types of articles I

collected and later analyzed. I found it particularly useful to have a clear sense of local

current events since these events were referred to by many of the parents I interviewed.

Yet another form of print from which I gathered data was the Internet. Because

many of the parents in my study told me that they read blogs written by other local

parents, rely on information about school happenings via the school district website, and

participate in social networking via the internet, I also decided to tap into these

discussions and conversations. To my surprise, many parents produce blogs in which they

share all kinds of opinions about local events, politics on various levels, and their

thoughts about heated debates within the community such as whether or not to put more

resources into the Talented and Gifted program as opposed to other programs aimed at

reducing the racial achievement gap. Reading these blogs was another way that I was

able to get a sense of what kinds of topics parents were debating and how they were giving meaning to race in the context of these political battles.

One concrete example of this beneficial use of the Internet came when I learned that a public meeting for parents of Black and Latino children was planned and that it was open to the public. This meeting was a chance for parents of Black and Latino kids to talk about race, inequity and the local public schools. Because I was tapped into the appropriate Twitter pages and Facebook feeds (as well as social networks with people who were invested in this event), I learned about this meeting and was able to attend. Thus, the internet provided me with tangible resources as well as connections to important meetings, lectures and rallies that were going on in the community that served as additional public spaces for me to gather data.

Finally, I paid close attention to flyers posted around town and documents that were sent home from school in the backpacks of the children I babysat, especially parent newsletters. I found reading the middle school student planner also helpful in gaining insight into the life of a middle school student. Through the triangulation of data collected in these three ways, as well as across different times, places in the community, actors in the community, etc., I was able to gather a tremendous amount of information about the racial meaning making of white affluent families.

Data Analysis

As I continued to gather data over a two year time period, I also began to analyze my data. After concluding an interview, I would transfer the digital data file onto my computer. After the interview was transcribed (either by myself or a transcription company) I would carefully clean the transcript. I then entered all of my data into a

computer program called MAXQDA. This text analysis program allowed me to code at multiple levels in order to find patterns and see connections across a vast amount of data. I was also able to enter newspaper clippings and field notes that I took into this program and code accordingly.

My coding process involved coding on three levels. The first level was across all of the child interviews and all of the parent interviews, separately. This allowed me to look for patterns in terms of what the children were saying and the meanings about race that they as a group were sharing. The second level was within each of the three sites. Much like Lewis (2003) coded within each of the three schools, I coded within each of the three neighborhoods. This allowed me to explore patterns within each of these three different parts of this broader community. Finally, I also coded on the level of family. Sometimes the parents would mention something that the child would also discuss. These connections were important to me in trying to figure out how the process of socialization works. By coding the same text in multiple ways, I was able to see patterns and themes in my data. For example, when a child mentioned the police, I was able to code her language in terms of "child's view of the police"; "Evergreen and police presence"; and "current events: parent talking to child about police." In this last code, I could code both as a current event that a parent spoke to their child about, but also specifically as an example of parents talking to their kids about the police." Through analyzing my data using this qualitative data analysis tool, I was able to develop the themes that are elaborated upon throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

Researcher Standpoint

My own social position as a white, youngish, woman mattered a great deal in conducting interviews about race and racial socialization with white parents and kids. Numerous times, parent and child respondents told me that they only felt comfortable talking to me or that they only answered my questions the way they did because I was white. With respect to my age, during parent interviews, many of which were with mothers, I presented as someone of an age where I was beginning to think about raising children, which lead the moms into long explanations of parenting styles and philosophies. With the children, while I unavoidably held a great deal of power in the interview as an adult interviewer, I told all of the kids at the beginning of the interview that they were "experts," that they knew much more than me, and that I was curious and excited to learn from them. I tried to make them feel comfortable with me drawing on child-centered techniques (Hagerman 2010), which was of utmost importance given the potential of discomfort as a consequence of talking about race in American, a topic many white people avoid at all costs.[5]

Given that I was interviewing affluent, highly educated families, I also emphasized my own educational background, as well as the fact that I grew up in a family similar to the ones I was studying. This performance helped me gain rapport and establish myself in some ways as part of the same community as my participants. I was cognizant of the clothing and jewelry I wore to each interview and paid particularly careful attention to my performance of political identity. I always paid attention to the home the family lived in as I entered, and especially to the political bumper stickers and signs in the yard of the home, always attempting to appear as neutral as possible in my

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[5] Survey research demonstrates that whites are more likely than other racial groups to check the "I don't know" or "no response" box on surveys when questions about race are posed (Berinsky 1999, Forman 2004).

performance of political identity to gain trust from the respondents. This was particularly important given that my data collection process occurred during a moment of extremely high political turmoil in Petersfield.

In addition to the "insider" role that my own race played in this ethnography, I also made active attempts to control other aspects of how I came across to the people I interviewed. For instance, I purposely tried to emphasize my "outsider" status in relation to the local community; I collected my data in the Midwest while being a gradate student in the South, and this was of particular importance given intense local and state level political debates that happened during the period of my data collection. I also emphasized that I was not a child and that the kids had much to teach me. Overall, my own social positioning mattered quite a bit in this research and as such, it is crucial to note and acknowledge this factor (Sprague 2005).

Conclusions

As the famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) contends, in order to discern between a "twitch and a wink," one must observe and interpret this eyelid movement to understand what these gestures mean within the culture of the people performing this action: when is the movement a twitch and when is it a wink? He writes, "doing ethnography is like trying to read…a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior" (Emerson 2001, 57). Likewise, when thinking about how white children learn racial logic, I needed to "read" and understand the meanings of race shared and constructed by white families—I needed to see the world from their vantage point, as much as I possibly

could while recognizing the clear limits to doing so. While this was challenging given the

"undefined" and "taken for granted nature" of whiteness, as discussed by Perry (2002),

the triangulation of observation, interviews and content analysis helped me understand

the believes and practices of this group of people (Perry 2002, Appendix). Emerson

writes,

> "The foundational task of ethnography is to describe the specific 'meaningful structures' through which local actors produce, perceive and interpret their own and others' actions. Such 'thick descriptions' are first and foremost 'actor oriented,' demanding that the ethnographer grasp and convey how members of the studied society or setting make sense of—interpret, finding the meaning of—the flow of events that makes up their lives" (Emerson, paraphrasing Geerz, 2001, p. 33).

Because this study seeks to explore how white children are making sense of race—that is,

what their racial logic or commonsense knowledge is—as well as how their parents are

both behaving and understanding their own behavior, it follows that "doing ethnography"

would be the most effective method for this project (Geerz 1973).

Like other ethnographers studying white racial meaning-making such as Kefalas

(2003), Lewis (2003) and McDermott (2006), I transplanted my life to this metropolitan

area. I lived in this community, I worked in it, and I socialized in it. I lived in two

different neighborhoods over the course of my data collection process, I made many

friends, I worked multiple jobs including teaching at the local university and babysitting

for multiple families. Though not formally tied to my study, I also coached a high school

athletic team at one of the local public schools, which allowed me to make valuable

connections with members of the community and gain perspective on some of the

racialized issues facing the public schools in this community such as the racial

achievement gap, fights over school funding, disparities between affluent families and

poor and working class families, and the zero tolerance discipline policies in place. None

of my data is directly derived from my connection to the public schools, though my experience as a coach allowed me make important and valuable connections that in some cases later lead to formal interviews.[6] I also developed a much more informed sense of the lived experiences of families in this community as well as how race operates that serve to frame and contextualize my research.

As Hughey (2012) writes, "racial dynamics can hide in the seemingly mundane and neutral activities of everyday life" (212). I found that indeed some of the most powerful examples of children producing racial meaning happened in the backseat of the car on the way to soccer practice or while waiting in line at the grocery store. The use of ethnography allowed me to access the everyday lives of upper middle class white families and the white habitus, as well as the meanings and meaning-making processes associated with race, racism and whiteness. By examining white racial socialization through ethnographic observations, interviews and content analysis of relevant documents, my study seeks to identify, interpret and represent the collective understandings and meanings of race shared between white, upper middle class families. This study also asks how children learn, reproduce and/or rework these ideas and how this process is tied to the white family.

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[6] The school administration, staff and students with whom I worked were aware of my study.

PART I: SHERIDAN

In the first part of this dissertation, I focus on families who have opted to live in Sheridan, a suburb of Petersfield. Parents in Sheridan have set up for their children a racial context of childhood that is, for all intents and purposes, almost entirely white. Their choices about schools, neighborhoods, and extracurricular activities set up a homogenous social environment comprised almost exclusively of others "like them": white children, white teachers, white neighbors, and white coaches. Somewhat ironically, given their multiple life choices that have led them to live mostly segregated lives, the families I interviewed in Sheridan expressed an almost universal racial commonsense that they are colorblind. They do not think race matters anymore for themselves or others. However, like others studying colorblind ideology have found, these parents explicitly deploy colorblind narratives about race while also holding very color-conscious negative views about people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2013, Forman & Lewis 2006, among others).

In Sheridan, the mechanisms of racial socialization are primarily implicit with many subtle and indirect messages about race pervading daily life including the choices of context of childhood and opportunities for experience and interaction. However, conversations about racial matters occasionally become explicit. When this happens, parents and children's very color-conscious racial understandings become apparent.

In the following three chapters, I will present data on particular families that I selected as they represent ideal types within my data and are illustrative of patterns that I found. Focusing in detail on these families allows me to outline the form and structure of socialization efforts. I will, however, note the ways that these families are representative of or distinct from others. The parents I discuss, like their peers in Sheridan, have

constructed a segregated, isolated, affluent racial context for their children and

themselves. Overall, I find that white children growing up within this racial context,

learning from being in and of the Sheridan community and engaging in local cultural

routines, "produce, display and interpret" a particular set of commonsense ideas about

race (Corsaro 2011, 21).[7] In addition to expressing a general form of colorblind

ideology, these children generally lack a sense of awareness or concern about historical

and contemporary forms of racial inequality and participate in what Forman (2004) calls

racial apathy, or "indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and lack of

engagement with race-related social issues" (Krysan and Lewis 2004, 44) both in theory

and in practice. The children in Sheridan possess very little knowledge about

contemporary racial dynamics or patterns of inequality but still, as I will show, have

generally acquired a range of negative perspectives on people and communities of color.

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[7] Cultural routines of going to school, participating in soccer and checking Facebook play an important role in how kids form a sense of group belonging: These spaces also provide opportunities for social interaction with other kids and with adults. Most white, affluent middle school kids in Sheridan routinely talk to countless people on a daily basis: parents, siblings, teachers, friends, enemies, coaches, babysitters, friends' parents, and even sometimes strangers. Their talk, and the language and ideas that are associated with it, is important in "establish[ing] social and psychological realities" (Ochs, 1988, p. 210; Corsaro 2011, p. 21).

CHAPTER 3: The Schultz Family—Constructing a Colorblind Context

The Schultz home was custom built in 2009 in a brand new housing development in the expanding suburban community of Sheridan. The stone-front, Tudor-style house has seven bedrooms, four bathrooms, a large, beautifully-manicured lawn, and professional landscaping. Unlike their neighbors, the Schultz family does not have a swimming pool. This fact is "very annoying" to Natalie Schultz, an eleven year old girl with a long blonde ponytail who loves to swim, dive, "lay out," and blast pop music while hanging out with her friends at their pools. The home includes a large playroom for the children filled with an air hockey table, a small movie theatre screening room with various gaming devices and a large collection of DVDs neatly organized in a glass case, snow-mobiles and bicycles in the garage along with tennis rackets and golf clubs to use at the local country club. There is an electric golf cart parked in the garage, waiting to take Mr. Schultz to the nearby country club when he is not working at the Petersfield hospital as a well-established doctor. All kinds of hoola-hoops, pom-poms, bicycles, ice skates, swim goggles, and other toys are neatly organized by Mrs. Schultz into labeled plastic containers along the side of the two-car garage, where a sporty silver Lexus sedan and a shiny, navy blue BMW minivan are parked. The Schultz also own a boat, which is docked at a lake in Petersfield, where they used to live up until two years ago. Natalie and her thirteen-year-old sister Erica love to water-ski on the lake in the summer, as well as watch the Fourth of July fireworks from their boat, their friends and neighbors doing the same in their own respective boats. The Schultz's also own a vacation home in Martha's Vineyard, which they use for their annual family vacation in the month of

July—they do not travel together other than during this one month to this one place given the work schedule of Mr. Schultz and the complicated schedules of the Schultz children.

Mrs. Schultz has carefully and stylishly designed the interior of the family home. Large professionally-taken photographs of her family adorn the walls. Mrs. Schultz has also designed a display case in which family honors including her children's music and dance awards, and her own local-government awards for citizenship and community service are kept. Mrs. Schultz is involved in state politics, having held a number of offices over the years. Other types of modern artwork accompany the photographs and awards, all very thoughtfully put together such that they match in color and style. The floors of the house are hardwood, while the bedrooms upstairs are carpeted, the children each having their own room, which they are supposed to keep tidy, though rarely do, clothes piling up on chairs and the floor. The girls' bathroom counter is jammed with all kinds of makeup, hair products, jewelry and perfume, bathing suits hanging in the shower. Eight-year old Danny has his own bathroom, much to the girls' dismay, which is tidy for the most part aside from the squirt gun parts lying on the counter that he is "working on fixing." Jan, the cleaning lady, comes every Monday to clean the house. Mrs. Schultz keeps the downstairs of the home immaculate, though the upstairs has a much more "lived-in" feel to it, a point of embarrassment to Mrs. Schultz that leads her to scold her kids for being "such giant slobs!"

The atrium of the home has a very high ceiling, which leads into the very open and airy first level of the home, one room blending into the next. The Schultz family is quite social, and their downstairs living space is ideal for hosting large cocktail parties with friends. They have a formal dining room with a large table and expensive china and

antique table accessories. Mrs. Schulz hates to cook, so often she hires a Petersfield caterer to come help her host parties. When the family is all at home, a rare occurrence given the busy schedules of all family members, they spend time in the kitchen together, a large open space with white granite countertops and all wood-covered appliances, including two ovens and a large refrigerator that blend into the wall such that one barely notices them. Mrs. Schultz loves flowers, so large vases of fresh flowers are dispersed throughout the house and a variety of plants decorate the sunroom. A small bulletin board sits in the corner of the kitchen with an excel spreadsheet that displays the weekly schedule for all of the children.

The four Schultz children, Joelle (15), Erica (13), Natalie (11) and Danny (8), are all blonde, athletic children. The girls are rather slender, particularly Joelle, each with long hair often braided intricately, sweeping across the front of their heads, or perfectly straightened with a flat iron. Erica and Natalie have a close friendship and they enjoy running track, playing tennis, horseback riding and swimming, usually together. The two younger girls are very focused on their looks at the moment, testing out different kinds of makeup, frequently raiding the eye shadow and lipstick of their sophisticated and aloof sister Joelle, which leads to sibling fighting between the girls. Natalie is a very inquisitive girl who has a lot to say, although her older sister Erica often speaks over her and interrupts her. Erica has many opinions and loves to talk and sing. The girls constantly bicker and yell at each other for "being soooo annoying!" or "so rude!" but at the same time, they share secrets and have their own secret coded language. The younger two girls look up to their big sister Joelle with a great deal of admiration and respect, bragging about her to anyone who will listen. Danny is rarely in the house, as his best friend,

another boy his age, lives next door. The two boys are extremely active and spend their time riding bikes, playing basketball in the driveway or soccer in the backyard. They also love to have "wars" in which they hide behind bushes and shoot each other with water guns. Danny often rolls his eyes at his sisters, especially when they hug him and try to cuddle with him. They call him their "little baby," which he hates.

Being in the Schultz home, one gets the sense that this family has a lot of fun together. There is a lot of commotion and laughing and yelling almost all the time, especially when everyone gets home from school. Many of the other children in the neighborhood spend time at the Schultz's home, which Mrs. Schultz encourages as she plays a type of mom role with everyone who enters her home. She is full of advice and encouragement and is clearly a favorite amongst the girls' friends. She prides herself on being a "cool mom so that they tell [her] stuff." For instance, all of Joelle's friends gathered at the Schultz's home before the prom to take pictures and drink sparking apple juice out of champagne flutes, pop songs like "Call Me Maybe" being piped through the house through a speaker system. The girls lined up with their dates along the staircase, posing in their brightly colored prom dresses, their dates with matching tuxedos, dancing to the music and awkwardly pinning boutonnieres on their dates' jackets. Mrs. Schultz organized a wine and cheese party for the adults after the kids left for the prom, "you know, to celebrate the end of all the [prom] drama!" Overall, the Schultz family appears to be quite popular in their neighborhood, among the parents and children alike.

Mrs. Schultz is a petite blonde woman who always wears multiple David Yurman bracelets that clink together as she talks, her long shellacked nails always a perfect light pink, large pearls in her ears. She is physically fit and wears lots of black Lululemon

yoga pants and matching tops. She has a large collection of formal wear, though she only wears these for parties or events. On an every day basis, she spends a lot of time dressed rather casually. She never wears blue jeans though, and refuses to be seen without makeup or jewelry. She has a fun and outgoing personality with a contagious laugh. She listens carefully when her children are speaking and is very emotionally and financially supportive and encouraging of their dreams and goals. Mrs. Schultz holds a great deal of pride in her children and wants them to be confident, assertive people. She speaks her mind, holds strong opinions and does not apologize for her beliefs, even when she admits they are quite controversial. While previously involved in politics, Mrs. Schultz is currently a stay-at-home mom, although she continues to organize benefits and parities for various foundations and charities, as well as for her friends.

Mr. Schultz is rarely at home, as he works at the local hospital. He works very long hours for a large paycheck, along with writing numerous grants and managing relationships with multiple drug companies at the same time. He is a very career-driven individual and has agreed with his wife to arrange their household along traditional gender lines, even given her previous career in politics, which she may or may not pick up again once the children are grown. Mrs. Schultz loves spending time with her children and seems happy with this arrangement. In addition, managing four children's schedules is a huge undertaking, particularly when Joelle, the eldest daughter, is such a successful gymnast and travels frequently for competitions and college recruiting visits, so having Mrs. Schultz at home makes the family's day-to-day life run smoothly.

Parents' Backgrounds

Mrs. and Mr. Schultz were both born in Green Bay, Wisconsin, which Mrs.

Schultz described as, "a lily-white community back then. The only people of color were

the [Green Bay Packers] football players. And they came in, you know, for the season

and then left, because it was all lily-white Catholic everywhere." Like most parents

interviewed in Sheridan, Mr. and Mrs. Schultz did not have much exposure to racial

diversity during their own childhoods. Like their own children, they grew up in a

predominantly white, Midwestern community and did not think about race, they tell me,

until they attended college in Petersfield. Mrs. Schultz describes dating a black man at

one point during college, as well as a Jewish man, which, as she tells me, "…was the first

Jewish person I had literally ever met." She tells me that this was a new experience for

her as she had only ever had friendships and relationships with white people. When asked

if she has any meaningful relationships with any person of color currently, she tells me

that no, she does not have anyone in her life right now who isn't white.

After college, Mrs. Schultz moved to California with her journalism degree to

work as a news anchor. In time, she returned to Petersfield to get her Master's Degree in

Communication, which is where she met Mr. Schultz who was finishing up medical

school.

Neighborhood and School Choice

After getting married, Mr. and Mrs. Schultz built a home in an exclusive

neighborhood of Petersfield, though eventually, they found their way to Sheridan. Mrs.

Schultz describes how these decisions unfolded:

> We initially chose Apple Hills [an affluent, entirely white neighborhood in Petersfield]
> …we had gotten married at the country club and so, you know, we had some connection
> in that neighborhood. And so all the young families there, that was a huge draw for us …
> we wanted to be in a community where you had sidewalks for your children, where it was
> a small close-knit community, and that's exactly what it was… we were very, very happy

there for seventeen years. But then it came time for our oldest to start high school, and we did not want to send her to North High School so we looked for the best high school we could, and decided that's where we would move to. That was the only decision... We moved to benefit our children's education. We didn't need to leave. Love it, we lived on the lake in a beautiful home just down from the governor. We were there for 17 years! I feel like everyone there is our family. You know, we've been through so much together that I really didn't want to move, other than it was the high school that drove us out of there over to Sheridan. But, you know, that's the price of knowledge!

Apple Hills is one of the most affluent neighborhoods in Petersfield and is predominantly-white. As Mrs. Schultz describes, this community is "close-knit," has it's own country club affiliated with it along with its own police force, making an otherwise "open" community feel symbolically gated and private. The kids there have very positive relationships with the police officers who patrol the neighborhood. The police here function to look out for folks in the community. They encourage drivers to slow down and engage in friendly conversation with residents as they walk their dogs or go jogging. The Apple Hills country club is a popular summer-time gathering place for the children of this community and is a way for the members of Apple Hills residents to stay connected despite their busy lives, as many of the families connected to Apple Hills explain to me.

Though the close neighborly relationships and the gorgeous properties and easy access to the country club make Apple Hills an ideal place to live in the minds of many, The Schulz's are part of a larger recent exodus from this community – and these families are moving straight to Sheridan. As Mrs. Schultz states, the reason for this departure is the fact that the families who live here have children who are reaching high school age and Evergreen High, the school to which they are assigned based on where they live, is not understood as a "good" school in the minds of many Apple Hills parents. The Schultz children, while living in Petersfield, attended private elementary and middle schools in

town – there are a plethora of elementary and middle school options in Petersfield. However, high school is an entirely different matter in this city as the private options are more limited, especially for families who seek rich extra-curricular opportunities, a full load of Advanced Placement courses, and limited political turmoil within the school itself.

Shapiro and Johnson (2005), Johnson (2006), Brantlinger (2003), Holme (2002), Lareau (2000), Cookson and Persell (1985), and others have explored the process and rationalization of school and neighborhood choice amongst middle and upper-middle class whites. Much of this research finds that white parents often choose schools based on reputation among peers. Specifically, Shapiro and Johnson (2005) found that the white parents in their study of school choice "tied a school's reputation directly to the race and class composition of its students. While claiming to be concerned about such things as safety and class size, the families we spoke with were ultimately seeking whiter—and in their view, inextricably wealthier—school districts for their children, regardless of any other of the school's characteristics" (Johnson 2006, 41). Further, in her discussion of the social construction of a good school, Johnson (2006) writes that parents in her study of the American Dream, wealth and school choice believed that "a good school is in a good neighborhood, and a good neighborhood is a wealthier and whiter neighborhood" (41). Similar to these findings, much of how parents in the Petersfield metropolitan area make choices about schools depends upon the word-of-mouth reputations these various schools hold and where these schools are located rather than test scores or other traditional measures of school quality. And, both the schools' reputations as well as their locations are connected to local shared understandings of race and class. For instance,

Mrs. Schultz describes her perceptions of Evergreen High, the public high school Joelle

was slotted to attend, and then her visit to this school:

> We had some concerns about the school because we had heard negative things about it, but we wanted to go check it out for ourselves. My friend is the president of the PTA there and she wanted us to attend Evergreen High. We were a fellow Apple Hills family, my kids are good kids…they're going to help out North High's grade point average! (laughing) But, you know, we could not get in to [visit] Evergreen High….there was no one who would make any arrangements for us to come and tour….Finally one day, I just called the principal, and I said, you know what? We're going to come. My husband and I are…just going to come in tomorrow. And we're just going to go walk through some classes…we just forced our way in. It wasn't a welcome mat as it should have been. And I need a great high school that is going to work for my kids.

Mrs. Schultz is an involved parent who desires a positive relationship between school

administrators and her family. She believes her children "are going to go places." For

instance, she describes Joelle as "very, very, you know, smart, very wise, business-wise,

and talented and driven." In her efforts to insure her children's educational success and

to cultivate the talents and interests of her kids, she has high expectations of the schools

they attend. For her, these include basic things like returned phone calls and

administrators who are open to giving interested parents tours of the school, as well as

high test scores and good college placements. From Mrs. Schultz's vantage point, the

school's relationship with her family is transactional: by sending her child to this school,

she will be providing them a high achieving student who will then give back to the school

community in terms of higher test scores, leadership activities, and parents who are

willing to help out and donate money to various school-affiliated events and programs.

Wanting to be open-minded rather than following the advice of some of her other friends

who urged her to move to Sheridan without second thought, Mrs. Schultz did tour the

school get her own sense of the quality of Evergreen High and how her children would fit

in at this institution. In this way, Mrs. Schultz differs from other parents in this study as

well as affluent parents in other studies, like that of Johnson (2006) and Cookson and

Persell (1985) in that she physically visited Evergreen High, trying to maintain an open

mind despite knowledge of its reputation amongst her fellow affluent, white peers. She

describes her tour:

> We were out in a hallway talking to an English teacher. And an African American student came up to her and starts talking…we just mentioned that, "we're going to this Mr. Donald's class, the biology teacher"… And this African American student says, "You're going to that asshole's classroom? I can't stand that bastard." Well, the teacher's mortified, right? I mean, I can see the look of shock on her face… And she's trying to shut this girl up, who's just talking and talking, really inappropriately, really loudly, to parents, prospective parents!

When describing this experience, Mrs. Schultz sits on the edge of her chair, clearly

impassioned. She continues to describe the tour:

> What stunned us was that it was obvious that the teacher did not have control of the situation. And that frightened us a little bit, you know?...You're the adult. She's a junior. Who's in charge? Who's running the ship here? So then we go to the biology classroom, and we're sitting through his biology class, which we enjoyed thoroughly…after class, [the teacher] took us aside…he said, 'What other schools are you looking at?' And I said, '…I'll be touring Sheridan tomorrow.' And he said, 'I've been a summer school teacher in Sheridan for the past 17 years. … I know those families, I know that community, I know those students, and I will tell you right now…if she were my granddaughter, she'd be going to Sheridan in a minute. That is an excellent school with excellent students and an excellent, excellent community. Get her out of Evergreen.' This is their number one teacher telling me this! I'm like, "okay then."

Paradoxically, despite what gets reported in informal social networks, Evergreen High

has higher average SAT scores than Sheridan High (See Table 3), and both schools have

similar ACT scores and AP course offerings. However, the reputation of Evergreen High,

especially in white, affluent circles here is that this is not a good school – primarily

because of the kids who attend:

> You know, Maggie, there were policemen on every single floor... We were walking down halls and kids would physically hit our bodies, … Whereas, at Sheridan…kids moved out of our way. One boy even held the door for us. They'd say, 'excuse me,' It was a much more respectful environment …I just felt like at any moment, things could explode at Evergreen…and become an unsafe situation. I don't want my kids to worry about safety. I want them to concentrate, focus, and direct their energies at school, nothing else. So I

went to Sheridan the next day and thought, this school would fit for all of our kids because all our kids are very mature, focused, children.

Mrs. Schultz's concerns about Evergreen High center on the behavior of the children who attend the school and her perception that the teachers and administrators are unable to maintain control. Police are present in all of the schools in Petersfield as a matter of policy, and while some violence does occur in schools like Evergreen High, according to members of the Evergreen High community, the school is generally perceived as "safe" by those who attend the school and work within it (Field notes from informant interview with school social worker). Mrs. Schultz is also concerned about safety issues and feels uncomfortable in this school environment. While none of this discussion about school choice is overtly about race or class, Evergreen High's demographics are undeniably different than those of Sheridan, many more students of color attending Evergreen, and many more kids living in poverty as well.
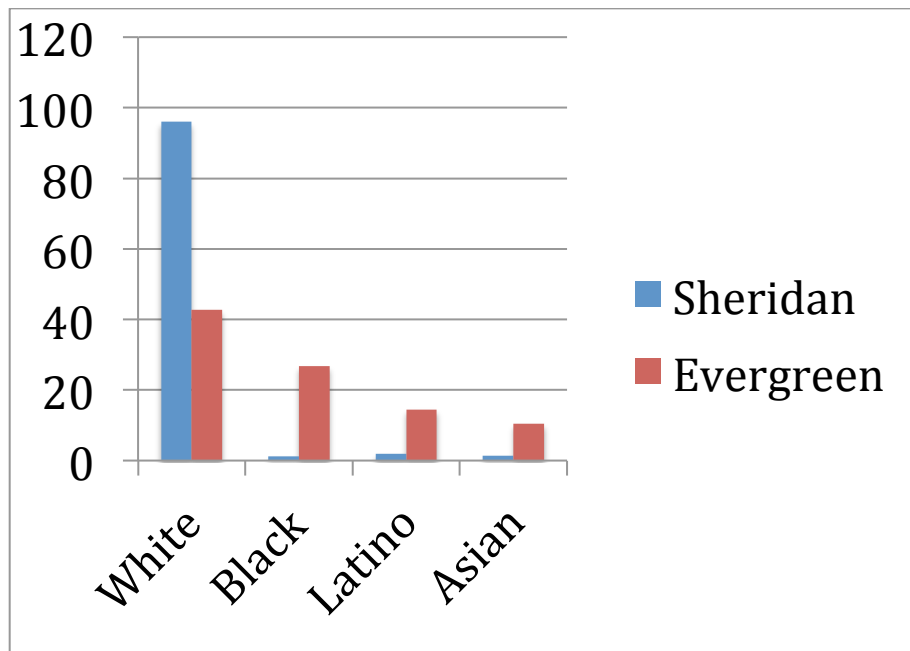
Figure 2. Racial demographics of high schools
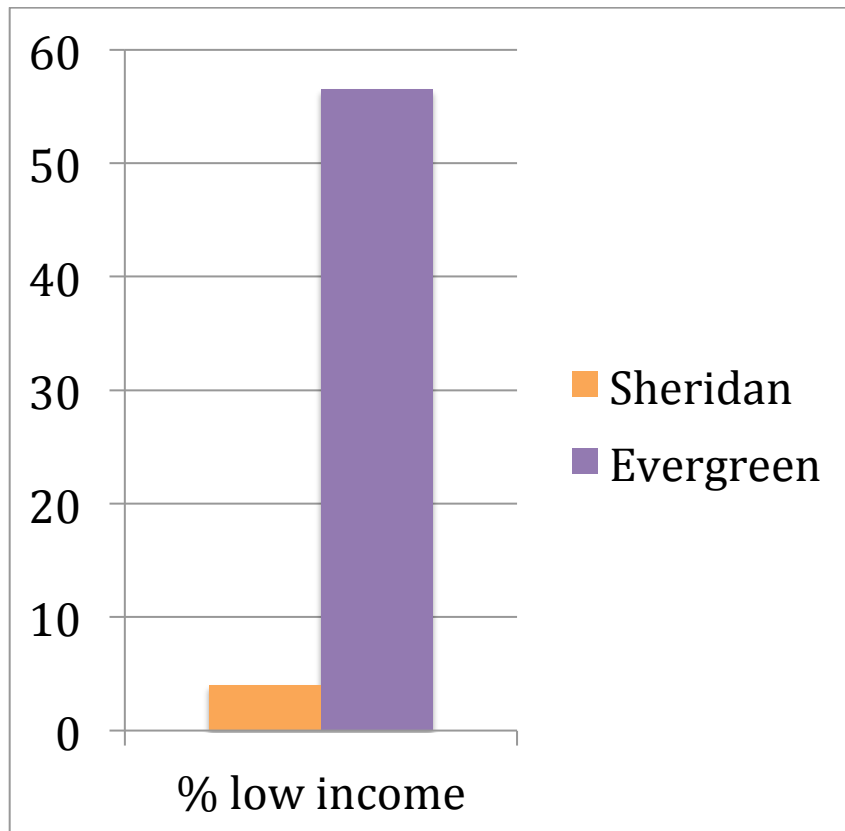
Figure 3. Percent of low income students across high schools

Ironically, however, when it comes to standardized test scores, these schools are

comparable.
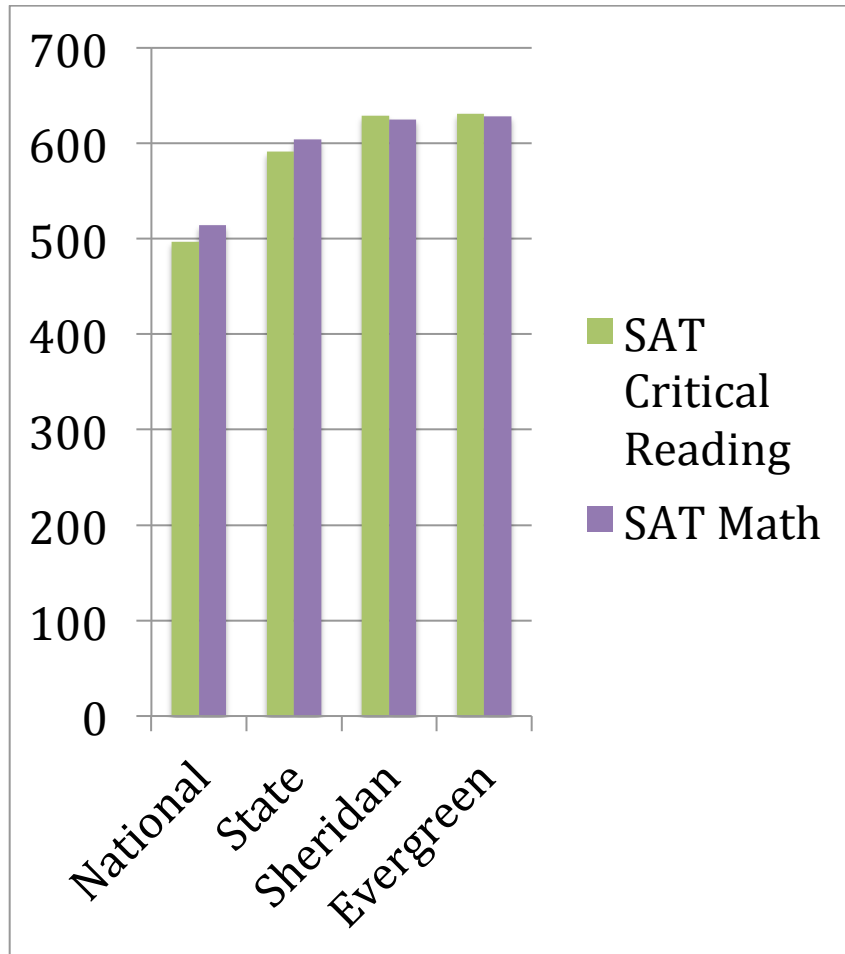
Figure 4. SAT scores across schools

Prioritizing a particular type of school and community experience for their children, the Schultz family, like many other families, moved to Sheridan from their Apple Hills community. Erica, Natalie and Danny moved from their private K-8 school to the public Sheridan middle school, which is 96% white, and Joelle enrolled at Sheridan High. I ask Mrs. Schultz if she thinks about the lack of racial diversity in her children's lives:

> **Mrs. Schultz:** [Sheridan] is lily-white, yeah.
>
> **Maggie:** Is that something that you and your husband talk about?
>
> **Mrs. Schultz:** No, we don't talk about it. It's, you know, it's a non-issue for us. I would welcome more people of color, but I just want everyone who's here to be on the same

> page as all the parents like me. I want to be in a community that all feels the same as we do, which is, we value education. And that is what this community is--we've found a community that really supports education.

While the Schultz's choice reflects priorities of safety and good schools, the choice is also connected to racialized local understandings about who values education, what kinds of communities support education, and how different groups of children behave. The biology teacher's comments about the "excellent community" and "those families" in Sheridan in contrast to the African American girl's words in the hallway, while subtle, reflect the local racial commonsense shared by many members of the white community in the Petersfield area, as do Mrs. Schultz's comments above about who values education.

Thus, the racial context of childhood for the Schulz children is set-up as a result of these school and neighborhood choices, informed in part by local, shared, white racial commonsense, and is a segregated, white context. They live in predominantly-white neighborhoods, attend predominantly-white schools, and have exclusively white friends. Through their interaction in local cultural routines and everyday talk, embedded within this context of childhood, the Schulz children develop their understanding of what race is and how it is relevant for their lives and others.

Erica and Natalie Schultz

Erica and Natalie love living in Sheridan. They tell me about all of the "nice people" that live on their street and explain how within hours of moving in, other kids in the neighborhood came over to introduce themselves and invite them to play. Like other kids I interviewed in Sheridan, Erica and Natalie think of their community as safe and happy and filled with "good people." They talk about missing their friends in Petersfield, but then describe how they plan to spend most of the summer at the country club in Apple Hills and on their boat with their friends.

Most of the children in Sheridan that I interviewed felt very comfortable telling me that "I only have white friends" or "I don't know anyone who is a different race than me." This includes the Schultz children. When I ask the children why they think this is, typical responses to this occurrence range from naturalizing remarks like, "well, there are more white people in the United States than black people, so it just makes sense" to "I am nice to the one black girl in my class but she is really quiet and it's hard to get to know her" to "there is not even one single person in my class who isn't white so I don't have the chance to meet anyone who is a different race."

When asked about the racial makeup of their school in Sheridan, the Schultz girls tell me that their school is "diverse but mainly, it's all white," citing the handful of students of color in their school as evidence of the diversity including "one Mexican and one African American." At one point, Natalie tells me that she would guess her school is 80-85% white. In reality, the school is 99% white. Mrs. Schultz, overhearing the girls talking about this diversity, looks at me with a smile, indicating that while she knows the school is not diverse, she is amused that her daughters perceive that it is. Here, it is obvious that Mrs. Schultz recognizes race, but as always, she places no significance on talking about race remaining silent as her daughters inaccurately debate the racial composition of their school.

Research on white adults finds that whites often incorrectly estimate the size of nonwhite populations. For example, Gallagher (2003) speaks to the "hypervisibility of blacks by whites" in a context of high levels of racial segregation (p. 383). Similarly, Alba, Rumbaut & Marotz (2005) and others studying racial innumeracy find that whites engage in a "numerical inflation" of the size of the nonwhite population in the United

States. The Schultz girls over-estimate the number of nonwhite children in their school and they pay close attention to and notice the few students of color who attend the school, interpreting the school as a diverse space even though the student population is almost entirely white. This designation of the school as "diverse" seems to be because of the presence of only a few students of color.

When I ask the girls if they would prefer a school where there was more diversity, Erica tells me, "I don't know. I've never really thought about it. Everyone is just the same, so I don't think it matters if there is [more diversity] or not. We are all the same." Here, again demonstrating her political belief that America is post-racial and that race as a concept holds little significance Mrs. Schultz does interject, complimenting her daughter on this response, and expressing support and encouragement of her daughter's "colorblind" language. Both Mrs. Schultz's silence earlier with respect to the level of diversity at Sheridan public schools and her affirmation of Erica's statement, "We are all the same," are examples of racial socialization in action. While subtle, implicit, and unintentional, in these two moments, Mrs. Schultz contributes to the ways in which her children think about race.

The girls tell me about their friend groups, explaining that part of the reason they aren't friends with the handful of kids of color at their school is because most of them are boys.

> **Natalie:** Yeah, and then Elian is the other guy. But there are very few different colored people in our school. It's diverse but mainly, it's all white. And so, and they're both boys, so I can't really say they're my close friends. But if, maybe if I were a boy, probably. I don't know. Because I'm not a boy, I'm not their friend.

The girls then tell me why they think their school is so white, after a long pause, indicating that they most likely haven't thought much about this:

>**Maggie:** So why do you think that your school is mostly white? Like why do you think that that is the case?

>**Natalie:** I dunno….

>**Erica:** Well, I don't know. Probably because it's a really good school, so. Yeah.

After a little prodding, Erica tells me about how she thinks in other schools, there is more

diversity but also more problems:

>**Erica:** Because, well, actually, in guidance, we've talked about this. Sometimes in some schools, kids have lots of problems. Like in the city where there are lots of African Americans. So I, we usually, uhhhh, because like maybe something bad or hard is going on in their life and then they take their anger out on other kids or other things and be a bully? Or like sometimes, they could just have a cold spirit maybe even and not even care about people. And sort of, or even if their surroundings aren't as good, like if they grow up around bad surroundings, they probably would look up to older kids that are bad or take drugs and steal stuff and have guns. They probably follow in their footsteps….Or if your family isn't very nice or [doesn't] care about you. Or like I said, if you look up to bad kids. I think that happens in city schools a lot. Like in Detroit or Milwaukee. But not here.

While these girls are growing up in an all-white context, it does not mean that they are

not learning important lessons about other racial groups. Though Erica has limited if any

exposure to Black children, she still has formed ideas about Black children: that there are

problems in the home environment for African Americans, that African Americans are

angry, that they are bullies, that they have a "cold spirit," that their neighborhoods are

"bad surroundings," that they "take drugs and steal stuff and have guns," and that African

American families don't care about their children. Erica has still managed to acquire

popular negative white stereotypes about Black children, their communities, and their

families despite growing up in an isolated, segregated, very white, affluent community

that claims to be post-racial and colorblind. However, as can be seen in how her parents

made choices about schools, for instance, Erica and Natalie are growing up with parents

and other adults in their lives like teachers who explicitly deploy colorblind narratives

about race while also holding very color-conscious negative views about people of color.

Growing up in a place with this seemingly contradictory logic, thus, leads to children like Erica and Natalie having a lot of confusion and questions about race—questions that they asked me when their parents were not around, for instance, about black hair, black culture, the language of racial others, and about things they see on television. As Allport (1954), Pettigrew (1998), Feagin and O'Brien (2003), and others discuss, intergroup contact, particularly the ability for intergroup friendship formation to occur, and under a very specific set of conditions, is one strategy that minimizes racist views and leads whites towards being more color-conscious and aware of how racial privilege works. Yet, in the social environment of Erica and Natalie, these types of intergroup interactions are unavailable to them, as they describe for instance when they tell me there are very few children of color at their school. This confusion and their questions about race can also be seen in the conversations and interactions they have with their sibling and peers.

Open discussions about race between children

Fighting to be the center of my attention, Erica and Natalie, sometimes talking over each other, tell me about their thoughts about race, jumping from one topic to the next, occasionally insulting each other by calling the other "a racist." In once instance, Natalie admits to me that she can't tell the difference between Chinese and Japanese people. Erica responds immediately, shouting loudly and into my microphone, to ensure I hear and record her, "YOU ARE SUCH A RACIST, NATALIE!" At another point, I present Erica with photographs of celebrities and ask her to identify them by race. As she begins to do so, Natalie yells out in an accusatory fashion, "RACIST!" when Erica points to Kanye West and says "Black."

This insult of "you're such a racist!" became a regular point of conversation during my time with Erica and Natalie. I learned through talking to them and spending time with them that this is a common insult their peers use with each other. This is true almost any time race is brought up in a discussion amongst peers or siblings and even in cases that seem unrelated to race altogether but instead involve discussions of color at all (e.g., of game chips or markers or t-shirts). This pattern is so prevalent, in fact, that Sheridan Middle School teachers have banned the use of the phrase "you're racist" or "that's racist" in their classrooms and hallways:

> **Erica:** They put signs with things that we shouldn't say in our school up in every classroom…one of them is like, you shouldn't call someone racist…or gay. Like there's always better words to use. And if you're hearing a conversation like, oh, that's so gay, or oh, that's so racist, you know, you can probably use better words….
>
> **Maggie:** So "racist" was one of the words that people aren't supposed to say?
>
> **Erica:** Yeah, mm-hmm. Like there's fag, gay, racist. So, yeah.
>
> **Maggie:** What if someone is doing something you think is racist?
>
> **Erica:** Kids at my school aren't racist, so that wouldn't be a problem.

This exchange is illustrative of several important patterns in Sheridan – first is the very narrow understanding of racism in this context; while explicit racism is frowned on in Sheridan, so is almost any talk about race in general. Ironically, although Erica reassures me that none of the children at her school are racist, if she did ever encounter an issue, she might struggle with how to report it, demonstrating a second pattern in Sheridan—no one here is racist and to call someone a "racist" is meaningless. Rather than having a real connection to race, the use of this term is more of a generic insult or just "a joke." In fact, like Erica and Natalie, students from Sheridan regularly deploy "that's racist" or "you're racist" as a way of insulting one another, or "as a joke." For example, one boy tells me, "Sometimes people just get mad at them or whatever and like call each other racists. It's

just like an insult." Another girl tells me that when they play games like chess, if you are "black" then your teammate might say, "you're a racist!" as a form of a joke. Another boy tells me, "If you wear all black to school one day, you might say, 'yo, I'm feelin' black today!' It doesn't mean anything. It's just a joke." Here, we see that students are thinking about race and color all the time, and simultaneously referring to such behavior, even jokingly as "racist."

Overall, these children are trying to figure out what race means. They try not to talk about a taboo subject. Yet, these children are not colorblind. They hold ideas about race, and share many of these ideas with the adults in their lives. But, because the adults in their lives do not provide them with the language or tools to talk seriously about race and racism, these children instead draw on "jokes" and the phrase "that's racist" since any talk about race in this community is perceived as racist. As opposed to have open conversations in classrooms or homes about racism or the problematic nature of calling someone "a racist" when they say they are on the "white team" in gym-class kickball or when playing checkers with a sibling ("I don't want to be black." "RACIST!"), adults here remain silent on the issue. So too do they attempt to police the children's language about race through the establishment of rules and punishments for kids who mention this topic, like the sign posted at Natalie's school.

The dilemma in Sheridan for children like Erica and Natalie, is that they aren't, in fact, colorblind. Not only do they see race/color but it carries meaning for them that they are only beginning to make sense of. Both locally and beyond Sheridan, they live in a world in which race matters. They are trying to figure out how to make sense of it all. Many kids, including Natalie and Erica, tell me various stories about the racial meaning

making that occurs in private spaces between them and their peers. For instance, Natalie

tells me about a slumber party where race came up between a group of white middle

school girls:

> **Maggie**: Can you think of a time where you talked about race with your friends?
>
> **Natalie:** Well…like I've been to a big slumber party, and everyone was like gossiping, you could say. And they were talking about other people, and like how they're not as good as us, you could say. And like how they were not as smart and everything, and how like they don't have any friends. And like how they don't really feel too bad for them and all, so.
>
> **Maggie:** Were they talking about their race?
>
> **Natalie:** I think they were, I mean, I think they were just judging people like as we say, a book on the cover. Like a lot of people, kids wouldn't, if they're a different race, they wouldn't include them. And like they wouldn't include them in their group. Like usually at school it almost seems like, in my class, they were sort of in a different group with like, they, sometimes it felt like they weren't even like, had any friends. Because no one would really want to hang out with them.
>
> **Maggie:** Do you remember what kinds of things they would say when they were gossiping?
>
> **Natalie:** Basically how they're not as smart and everything, and how like sometimes they would even say how their clothes are so ugly and all. And so, yeah.

I ask Natalie if she said anything to her friends about the gossiping and she told me

"that's just what we do, we gossip." Gossiping about other kids at school is a common

practice among middle school aged children, but in this case, it is focused on the two or

three Black students at the Sheridan middle school. Natalie, while willing to call her

friends out for being mean, does not seem emotionally impacted by her friend's behavior.

She talks to me very matter-of-factly, describing her friend's behavior as typical and as

just part of their everyday life. Interestingly, however, even though she offers this story in

response to an explicit question about when she and her friends talk about race, she does

not overtly name race in her answer. Here, she appears to want to talk about race with me, but is fearful of saying something I might find offensive.

In addition to not feeling entirely comfortable talking openly about friends' discussion of Black peers, Natalie and Erica, while top students at their school, seem to have limited and confused knowledge of the history of race in America. For example, when I ask Erica if she thinks racism still exists, she tells me:

> **Erica:** No, racism used to be a big problem. Like I learned at school how like racism is like diverse. And like black people are all in one group, white people are in their own group, Chinese should all be in one group. And like Eleanor Roosevelt, and how she went on the bus. And she was African American and sat on the white part.

Presumably, Erica is referring to the Jim Crow Era of du jure segregation and the famous story of Rosa Parks, though clearly Erica does not recall the details very accurately. Mrs. Schultz, who hears Erica's comments, does not intervene to correct her or guide her. Rather, she nods along as her daughter speaks, agreeing with Erica when she reaches conclusion: "But no. Racism is not a problem anymore. After the 1920s and all that, things changed."

Erica, as well as many other children interviewed in Sheridan, clearly have not been taught much about the history of race relations in America, either at school or at home. Of course I did not attempt to quiz the kids I interviewed on history, but their nonchalant, casually offerings of generally misinformed African American history was a notable pattern. In addition to getting major events wrong, Natalie and Erica, like many of their Sheridan peers also tended to flatten time, lumping all of black history together—events affiliated with the 1800s and slavery and those taking place a hundred years later during the Civil Rights Movement appear to be one and the same to many of these kids. For example, at one point, Natalie says, "yeah, racism was a problem when all those

slaves were around and that like bus thing." Like research on white adults racial attitudes, many of these children engage in the colorblind frame that minimizes racism, or suggests that "things are much better than in the past," which is understandable given the racial context in which they are embedded (Bonilla-Silva 2006: 29).

Connected to their narrow operational definition of racism, and their limited knowledge of history, Sheridan children understand the United States to be a meritocratic system in which hard work is rewarded. Almost all of the Sheridan children, including Erica and Natalie, told me that racism was something from "the olden days" or the past and that political liberalism, or the idea of equal opportunity, now pervades American society. When asking these kids how rich people become rich, they all make some mention of "hard work" and meritocracy, explaining that poor people are poor because they are "lazy" or "make bad choices" or "don't save their money." While some, like Erica and Natalie, discuss the "bad economy," they explain to me that "anyone can get a job at McDonald's and work their way up." And, as Erica commented at one point, "public school doesn't cost that much, does it? I think it might even be free!" as part of her argument that everyone can go to school and try to get scholarships to go to college. "Even a poor Black kid could try hard and be the best they can be and move up," she tells me. Overall, Erica and Natalie think a lot about race and they have lots of ideas and questions about people of color. They are provided with contradictory messages about race from the adults in their lives, but they do not often speak openly about this topic, at least not in a serious way. This lack of seriousness in talking about race can also be seen in how Mrs. Schultz talks to her children about the few people of color in their lives.

Conversations about race with parents

Mrs. Schultz tells me that they do not talk to their children about race because race "isn't an issue" in Sheridan. Yet, at a much later date, once we have established a more trusting relationship, I privately ask Mrs. Schultz again if she talks to the girls about race at all:

> **Mrs. Schultz:** You know, I guess, I mean, yeah, to the extent, Joelle has two twin girls in her school at Sheridan, Shika and Shaniqua or something. These are really funny, you know, all the S sounds. (laughing) And so we've laughed at those names, you know, it's like, what a group of names there! (laughing) Wow. And so up to that degree, you know, I guess we mentioned that. Other than that, it's just never come up, really, as a conversation.

Though subtle, Mrs. Schultz's joking about the names of the two Black students with her daughters sends Erica and Natalie the message that there is something funny or unusual about these names. Additionally, the children are shown that there is nothing wrong with this cultural mockery. This conversation is playful and humorous, not serious or meaningful, and reflects the contradictory racial messages passed to children in Sheridan. While it is okay to laugh about the names of the Black girls at school, it is not okay to talk about race or racism. Instead, these messages about the inferiority of people of color are often accompanied by an incredible degree of silence on the topic of race as a whole. Despite Mrs. Schultz claiming to never speak to her kids about race, of course when aggregated, her various comments, even in my limited exposure to the family, pass very clear messages to the Schultz kids about their own superior position within the racial hierarchy. And, these kids are in the process of trying to make sense of the complex and often contradictory aspects of their racial context of childhood.

The process of racial meaning making can be seen in action when observing Erica and Natalie talk to one another as outlined earlier as well as when they talk to me. One afternoon when the girls are showing me their new makeup, I ask them casually if they

have ever witnessed racism. Natalie, as she rummages through her makeup bag, responds, "So like I've never been teased about my race. So how would I answer that question?" She interprets my question as an inquiry about herself being mistreated because of her race rather than about the mistreatment of others, a miscommunication that ironically speaks to her vantage point of privilege. I follow up by asking her if she ever thinks about being white. She giggles in response and looks at me with a puzzled look, pausing, and thinking to herself for a moment. "No!" she finally says, "It doesn't really matter that I am white. All human beings are the same!" The moment of pause that Natalie takes demonstrates that she takes my question seriously and works to come up with the right answer to say to me. Once again, her comments illustrate the narrow understanding of racism shared by children in Sheridan, as well as the belief that racism is not present in the community of Sheridan. However, her pause is also meaningful and suggests that while she knows the right thing to say, perhaps there is more that she wants to discuss, like in other moments when she asks me how black girls "do their hair."

Role of parents

Much of what Erica and Natalie share with me about their perspectives on race and racism is perhaps expected given that the adults in these children's lives deemphasize the significance of race or the existence of contemporary racism themselves. For instance, Mrs. Schultz insists that she and her husband do not participate in any active, explicit attempt to teach their children lessons about race. In fact, Mrs. Schultz, when hearing about my project, insists that she doesn't think her family would be "a good fit" because race isn't part of family's life or a component of what she thinks is important to teach her kids. Yet, Natalie and Erica clearly possess ideas about race—ideas that are not always

consistent and ideas that they are in the midst of developing. These ideas are also often a reflection of what they are being taught or not by the adults in their lives. The Schultz parents deploy colorblind narratives about race while at the same time express negative views about people of color, and particularly black people. The teachers at the middle school do not allow children to talk about racism, and the school curriculum around black history is limited. These realities, situated within the specific context of childhood designed by the Schultz parents, mean that Erica and Natalie have very limited access to the tools necessary to talk about race in any way beyond the superficial and silly. These children are growing up in the white context of Sheridan, a context designed explicitly by their parents. This context is shaped in both overt (segregation) and subtle (negative descriptions of blackness) ways and influences the ideas about race these children form, especially as these children live and interact with those around them. Drawing on what is available to them within their context of childhood, Erica and Natalie, like their parents, deploy colorblindness in some moments and express negative views of people of color in other moments. And still, in other moments, these girls express confusion, ask questions, and seem perplexed when asked direct questions about race in America.

Conclusions

In a place where racial apathy and colorblindness prevail as ideological positions held by most parents, white racial socialization is an implicit rather than explicit process. Parents here do not think they are participating in this process, as race is supposedly not a part of their daily life or parenting practices. Parents here also tell me directly that race is not something they think much about or talk much about with their children. As such, racial socialization in families opting to live in Sheridan is an implicit process defined by

the decisions parents make, both the small, everyday parenting behaviors as well as the larger ones surrounding school and neighborhood choice. Small, daily parenting choices that matter for racial socialization include Mrs. Schultz's silence or nodding in particular moments, her affirmations of colorblind logic expressed by Erica and Natalie, and her laughter about the black girls' names. Larger, one-time choices include moving to Sheridan, selecting Sheridan High School, and enrolling the children in extracurriculars with children in Sheridan rather than from nearby Petersfield. Limiting the kinds of interactions Erica, Natalie and their other two children have with other kids, in sum, the Schultz parents indeed participate in racial socialization practices, even if these practices are not recognized as such and even if these practices are unintentional.

Further, in my observations of the Schultz family, it is clear that Mrs. and Mr. Schultz have made choices about where to live and where to send their children to school as well as how to talk (or not to talk) to their children about race that are shaped by their own racial attitudes and racialized perceptions of what constitutes a "good" school and a "good" neighborhood. These choices, informed by parents' commonsense racial knowledge, establish the racial context in which their children live. And it is in this context where their children produce knowledge through interactions with peers, teachers, coaches, parents, and others. The Schultz children's friends are exclusively white as is almost everyone with whom they interact on a daily basis. These parents have chosen Sheridan because they believe it is the best place for their children to attend school and is a place filled with people who value the same things as them. Ironically, while this initial choice to live in Sheridan was informed by locally shared understandings of race in the Petersfield community, they do not imagine race to be a part

of their everyday life now that they have moved to Sheridan. Drawing on the logic of colorblind racism, infused by a heavy dose of racial apathy, they have structured a life apart, where they remain separate from people of color. The Schultz parents participate in particular strategies of avoidance: they distance themselves geographically and emotionally from not only the struggles of people of color in America, but they literally separate themselves from people and communities of color altogether. These behaviors can be understood as racial apathy (Forman 2004) or culpable ignorance (Bartky 2002) in action. As Forman puts it, racial apathy is the "indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and lack of engagement with race-related social issues" (Forman 2004, p. 44). Similarly, as Bartky (2002) theorizes, culpable ignorance relates to "what does (or does not) go on in the minds of 'nice' white people which allows them to ignore the terrible effects of racism" as well as to how these same people "deny that they bear any responsibility for the perpetuation" of these effects. And, this indifference and ignorance shapes the parenting behaviors, one-time behaviors and everyday behaviors, of people like Mrs. Schultz. As a result, children like Erica and Natalie do their best to make sense of race within the colorblind context set up for them by their parents.

As my data demonstrate, interacting in this context, young people like Erica and Natalie, though not actually colorblind, have come to drawn on colorblind ideology to narrate the world around them, though when pushed, can also express explicit ideas about race, typically negative stereotypical views. These kids are learning how to "correctly" articulate hegemonic ideas such as everyone is equal, race doesn't matter, racism doesn't exist anymore, anyone can "make it" if they try hard enough, and that they, as white kids, are not the recipients of racial privilege because there is no such thing as race privilege

when everyone is equal. In many ways, these children are learning not only colorblindness but also racial apathy. And, at the same time, these children are also learning popular negative ideas about race, even in a place where race is a taboo subject.

Overall, Erica and Natalie are developing ideological ideas about race by interacting within the racial context of childhood in which they are embedded, a context designed by their parents for explicitly racialized purposes though "de-racialized" once constructed. The girls attend white schools, live in white neighborhoods, live in a country with a Black president and in a community where post-racial ideas flourish, do not have access to concrete meaningful interactions with people of color, and have parents who deemphasize the salience of race while at the same time, expressing highly negative views of families of color in typically indirect (though sometimes more direct) ways. While they still produce their own unique interpretive knowledge about the world in which they live, the racial context in which they live shapes the ideas they produce.

CHAPTER 4: The Avery Family—Race Talk in Sheridan

Within walking distance of the Sheridan Middle School at the top of a steep hill sits the large, ten-year-old colonial brick home where the Avery family lives. The Avery's neighborhood block is filled with young families and kids, and all the homes are decked out in full holiday décor during the wintery period of my data collection here. When I arrive at the Avery's home, a four bedroom, three bathroom home, holiday music is piped through speakers in every room, multiple Christmas trees are displayed, evergreen candles are burning, a fire is in the fireplace, and an array of Christmas cookies are baking in the oven. While the Avery's home is large and clean, it feels cozy, photographs of the kids being silly on vacation and extended family gatherings on display, an Americana theme throughout the house. The refrigerator is covered in papers—handouts from school and brochures for summer camps despite it being early December, and post-it notes with reminders that Mrs. Avery has written to herself about the upcoming holiday festivities. The children's schoolwork is also attached by magnet to the refrigerator, such as essays with an A written on top of it. The Avery's golden retriever Sam, an old sweet dog, is curled up in his bed by the fire, watching the activity around him.

The Avery's backyard is large and wooded, covered in snow at the time: a perfect hangout for Jacob Avery, an eleven-year old boy who loves to snowmobile through the woods in the winter and hike with his friends through them in the summer. Jacob has floppy brown hair and blue eyes and is a cheerful, thoughtful child. He loves Sam the dog, sports, and video games. His daily "uniform" is a t-shirt from one of the various youth sports teams to which he belongs, athletic pants and sneakers. He plays hockey,

football, basketball, and baseball, along with snowmobiling, his "number one passion." Jacob also loves math and science and wants to be an engineer when he grows up, just like his dad. Jacob has two sisters: Lauren, a twelve-year-old who attends Sheridan Middle with him, and Alicia, a fourteen-year-old freshman at Sheridan High. Lauren is a funny, sweet, animal-lover with brown hair. She has been a star swimmer since childhood, and she wants to be a veterinarian when she grows up. Their older sister Alicia is in her first year of high school, and she is primarily focused on her friends and peer dynamics. Alicia has a close-knit group of friends who are constantly texting and calling her, which leads to a great deal of giggling on Alicia's part. Alicia is involved in theatre at school, along with belonging to the art club. Lauren, Alicia and Mrs. Avery are quite close, while based on comments made by Jacob, he and his father seem to spend a lot of time together.

Parents' Backgrounds

Both Mr. and Mrs. Avery grew up in predominantly white, Midwestern communities. Mrs. Avery tells me that she "literally saw the first person of color" she had ever seen when she was 18 and went to college in a city. Her hometown was an entirely white small farming community. Mr. Avery, too, grew up in the Midwest without much exposure to various forms of diversity until he went to college.

As a chemical engineer who works in locations across the country, Mr. Avery receives a high paying salary, though Mrs. Avery, unlike most other Sheridan mothers interviewed, insists on working full-time as a pediatric nurse at the local hospital, which she does out of enjoyment rather than financial necessity. Mr. Avery is often traveling for work, thus I never met him during my data collection period. Mrs. Avery tells me about

him, noting in particular his more extreme conservative political views in comparison to

what she perceives are her own more moderate conservative views. Given the importance

placed on political affiliation in the Petersfield metropolitan area, Mrs. Avery thinks it is

important for me to know that they do not always agree on things, but that they are both

Republicans.

Mrs. Avery is an attractive forty-five year old nurse with curly dark brown hair

and eyes, often wearing her nursing scrubs. She has a calm demeanor, though she is very

upbeat, warm and friendly. She listens carefully to her children when they speak, and she

appears to genuinely value what they have to say. She laughs a lot with her children, the

four of them closely bonded evidenced by the number of inside jokes they share and the

openness in communication that exists between them, even about subjects that most other

families seem to avoid, such as sex or drugs and alcohol. In fact, Mrs. Avery tells me that

she is "the parent all the other moms come to for advice about how to talk to their own

kids" about these uncomfortable topics:

> When things happen at school, we talk about it, you know? Like, how do you think that person handled that situation and what do you think they could have done differently? How would you have handled that? And then well, here's my suggestion. Because I think too, with girls especially, you know, people say, "Oh they just have to figure it out when they start to get to this age range" but they don't know how to figure it out. So, we as their parents need to teach them how to figure it out, how do you do conflict resolution? How do you be a good friend? How do you, how do you do those things and to just say, "they'll figure it out" I don't necessarily agree with because they don't know how to figure it out. You're assuming they do, and they don't! So you've got to give them tips! When you meet someone, look them in their eye, shake their hand, say "Hi, how are you?" I mean, when they meet an adult, they are absolutely to look them in the eye and I mean, if I'm talking to another adult and they come up, they need to say, "Hi Mrs. So and so, how are you today?" Basic. Basic. Basic manners. You know. Treating adults with respect as well as their classmates, you know? But starting at a basic level (laughing) eye contact, stick your hand out, smile. You know, all of those things. Mmm hmmm. And then of course there is all the stuff about sex, which parents try to avoid. I don't try to avoid it. I am a nurse and I approach the discussion as such, but I mean, I'd prefer they hear stuff from me than from god knows where else! I can't get over how nervous so many parents are to just have open discussions with their kids! It really astounds me.

Over the course of spending time with the Avery family, I observe Mrs. Avery asking her children lots of questions about their lives and about what they think about particular topics. I notice that she knows all of her children's friends and details about them. She also has strong ties to the parents of her children's friends and while permitting her children freedom, she also keeps very close tabs on where they are and with whom they are spending their time. This seems especially true for Alicia, the high school student. While kids in other families that I interviewed seem to be annoyed by their parents' oversight, the Avery children seem to have a trusting relationship with their mother, so much so that Alicia even talks to her mom about dating and relationships. Overall, Mrs. Avery tells me that she and her children communicate very openly about a variety of topics including race.

Mechanisms and Content of Race Talk

While other parents in Sheridan avoid this topic altogether, Mrs. Avery engages in explicit and direct discussions about race with her children, in addition to making similar kinds of choices about neighborhood and school as other families in Sheridan. As I glean from interviewing Mrs. Avery and observing this family, while the race talk in the Avery house is more overt than in other families, often it is the Avery kids who initiate these conversations about race rather than their parents.

> **Maggie:** So, do you talk to your kids about issues of racial inequality or issues of race?
>
> **Mrs. Avery:** (sigh) I guess it would just depend what comes up in the news or on TV um…or like when Alicia talks about the one black girl in her class and how she doesn't know her, and, and I say, 'Well Alicia, do you say hi to her in the hall?' and she's like, 'Oh no.' And I said, 'Why not!?!?!' You know too, I think they see different parts of Petersfield when we go there for stuff where there is lower income or where there are probably more, you know, diversity, and they'll say, 'Why do they all tend to live there?' Well because those are less-expensive apartments and you know, they aren't as expensive and that sort of thing.

Maggie: So do they ask you those sorts of questions?

Mrs. Avery: Mmm hmm. And I'm open about what I have to share. Again, I guess I'd rather have them hear it from me, hear everything from me, than again, just trying to figure it out on their own or hearing it from friends, or um from people who don't know the facts, and I'll tell them too, 'It doesn't matter what color you are, its, its, its, you know, did you go to school? Did you do well? Do you have a job?' You know, I say, 'They are trying as hard as they can. It doesn't matter, some people start out life with less advantages and you know, they have to choose to make—[Sam, leave her alone! He wants you to throw it (laughing) he's like oh! A new friend! (to dog)]—um, so its just, yeah, having those conversations, 'it doesn't matter what color you are, its really just, what you do with your life,' you know, and 'what you're given and what your goals are and if you have parents behind you to support you,' you know. So it doesn't matter that you're white if both of your parents are loaded and off traveling and don't care that you're doing your homework or not or don't pay any attention to you, you may wind up going down a wrong path.

Mrs. Avery explains that she talks to her children about race when they bring it up and ask her questions, or when something happens at school, such as Alicia talking about how the one black girl in her Algebra class seems to ignore her and is "weird."[8] Alicia's initiation of a conversation about the one black student in her class, or when Lauren tells her mom about ideas she has learned from her friends about Chinese people are examples of what Hughes refers to as "bidirectional" racial socialization. That is, parents shape their parenting behaviors based on what is happening in their child's social and personal world. As Hughes writes, "As curious, observant, and developing social beings, children are likely to pose questions, comments, and critiques that foster and shape parents' racial socialization behaviors (Hughes and Johnson 2001). In the case of the Avery's, much of what Mrs. Avery decides to talk about with her children is informed by what her children bring up in casual conversation within the private sphere of the family.

However, when Mrs. Avery responds to the questions her children bring up about race, what she says often lies in contradiction with what the children observe in their

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[8] Mrs. Avery connects this discussion to that of sexuality—again, she wants her children to learn about sex from her rather than peers, teachers, or others that may provide misinformation. Because Mrs. Avery is a nurse, she is particularly interested in being the one to provide sexual education to her children.

daily lives. For instance, Mrs. Avery's colorblind comment that "it doesn't really matter what color you are" contradicts what the Avery children see when they leave their rich, white suburb and drive through "diverse" neighborhoods of Petersfield, noticing racialized patterns in where people live as they do so. While Mrs. Avery talks about the importance of working hard and having supportive parents, the larger contextual message her children receive about race is that that people are poor because they don't work hard, and the people who are poor are also people of color. This contextual lesson is reinforced by Mrs. Avery's comments about why "they" all live in "less expensive apartments"— how can this be true if "color doesn't matter"?

Mrs. Avery's own racial logic is deeply informed by her own experiences, many coming from working in the emergency room at the Petersfield hospital:

> I see everybody from all over the state and other states that come to our unit for different reasons, all social classes and um, I do feel that there are times, regardless of race, (sigh) I don't necessarily think it is race, I think it's more economic, um lines that um that I see people acting out on those things. Or they will um they will play that card. Well, I'm poor so therefore. And they could be white poor or black poor, it doesn't matter. Well I'm poor so therefore, you're treating me this way. I've seen someone say well, "Because we are Black, you're not treating us in a certain way" and that's just ridiculous. It's absolutely not true. You're here! We're treating you! So, I don't see as much with race as with economic status, it doesn't matter what race you are but how much money you have and then how they respond in that situation and how they treat their children and the demands on—well we want meal tickets, we want a phone card, we want a gas card, we want this, do do do do deh. They just know, they come in and they know! They know.

Here, Mrs. Avery states that the differences she notices in how people behave in the emergency room has more to do with their class position than race position. Yet, at the same time, she talks in a somewhat convoluted way about the "race card" and who is more demanding of assistance while in the hospital. As she continues, it seems as if her stories are in fact about Black families, and Black mothers in particular, despite earlier stating that she works with both the "white poor" and "black poor":

> I am just appalled at how these Black mothers talk to [their kids], how they um just treat them in general, you know? The ones who they are telling to shut up and I mean just basic communication with their kids. And they are out partying until 1 or 2 in the morning and you know the kids are up with them, and you're like, really? What were they doing up at this party at 2 in the morning? The 2 year old. You know?...My job is to take care of the patient first, and then the family. So regardless of who they are, their child is my number one focus and it is for everyone in that unit. I mean, um, sometimes they're social status makes it more difficult, it just, sometimes it can just be a blockade because you know you've got this boyfreeend (imitating how she believes a Black person speaks) and don't let this one in and don't let that one do that and social work is trying to get the kid back in school or the kids are hungry, so you know, we give a lot of food away at the hospital, but sometimes, their social situation makes it more difficult to take care of the child. But after all this time, it's the newer nurses who don't know quite how to work it yet? And they have to figure out you know, but it doesn't phase me anymore … If I need to, if they are misbehaving in the room, I kick them out! Don't care! This is why I'm here—you guys take your crap elsewhere, you know! (laughing)

Mrs. Avery expresses great frustration with parents in general who bring their children to the emergency room after what she believes are otherwise avoidable accidents, like having your two-year-old with you at a drinking party at 2am. And while she tries to pull apart race and class, in the end, the concrete examples she provides are about specifically "black mothers." Mrs. Avery seems uncomfortable with what she is saying, and even expresses this to me, though she tells me that she is "just trying to be honest" with me. Above all else, she tells me, she cares about the wellbeing of the "innocent" children that are brought to the emergency room, especially those that are impoverished due to "poor decision-making on their parents' behalf."

Mrs. Avery contrasts the families she works with in the hospital with the few families of color who live in Sheridan. One afternoon, I accompany Mrs. Avery to one of Jacob's school basketball games at Sheridan Middle School. As we sit in the stands, she talks to me about the few families of color who live in Sheridan:

> **Mrs. Avery:** What I like about the few black families that do live in Sheridan is that they don't fall into that stereotypical, um, you know, place of an African American which is the ghetto talk, the baggy clothes, if you were to put a picture up of a stereotypical kid you know what someone might envision, they don't fall into that. Um, but again I do feel that it is more economic class. I mean, they have parents who are working hard and

following their kids in school and making sure that they're doing what they need to do. They value education, you know? And they themselves are educated.

Like Mrs. Schultz, Mrs. Avery likes living in Sheridan because she feels that the other families around her share her values, especially that of the importance of education. She distinguishes between the black families in Sheridan who she perceives as having a higher class status than most black families, and those who use "ghetto talk" and wear "baggy clothes" and live in cities like Petersfield – the first group valuing education according to her, the second group presumably not valuing education.

In contrast to most other Sheridan parents, Mrs. Avery is willing to speak openly with her children about race, especially when her children initiate these conversations. However, the messages she conveys are consistent with much of what previous scholars have found in the their work on new forms of racism. In general, new models of racism fall into three categories: *sociopsychological perspectives* [Modern Racism (McConahay 1986); Symbolic Racism (Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears and Henry 2003); Racial Resentment (Kinder and Sanders 1996); Subtle Prejudice (Pettigrew and Meertens 1995); Aversive Racism (Blair 2001; Dovidio and Gaertner 2000; Dovidio 2001)]; *social structure perspectives* [Group position (Blumer 1958); Laissez-faire Racism (Bobo, Kleugel and Smith 1997); Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al. 1999)], and *political theories* [Political ideology, race-neutral policies, racialized politics (Sniderman et al 2000)] (Sears et al. 2000). Mrs. Avery seldom if ever deploys old-fashioned racial tropes or Jim Crow style racism. She seems sympathetic in the abstract to the fact that families don't all have the same opportunities and says she tells her children that color doesn't matter. Yet, her discussion of black people, and especially black parents, is filled with ambivalence and negative stereotypes. And, her explanations about racial inequality

ultimately blame blacks for their group position as this position is understood to be the

result of a lack of hard work within a meritocratic system (Blumer 1958). Her racial ideas

map onto what Bobo, Kleugel and Smith (1997) refer to as laissez-faire racism.

Laissez-faire racism is a new form of racism uniquely based in an historical

analysis, which includes negative stereotyping of blacks by whites, the practice of

blaming blacks for the black-white gap in socioeconomic standing, and "resistance to

meaningful policy efforts to ameliorate US racist social conditions and institutions"

(Bobo, Kleugel and Smith 1997). This new ideology gives citizenship rights to blacks,

but at the same time, views conditions of socioeconomic, educational, occupational, etc.

inequality as not the result of a history of subjugation and discrimination but rather,

outcomes of a free-market, race-neutral state. This new form of racism blames blacks for

their current condition and rejects the need for the implementation of public policies

aimed at addressing racial inequality. And, the ideas that Mrs. Avery has about race

appear to be very similar to these.

Overall, Mrs. Avery is less avoidant of racial subject matter than other Sheridan

parents, but still the content of her race talk is not very different than the ideas shared

with other whites in Sheridan. For instance, when asked if and how they talked to their

children about race, most other Sheridan parents told me that "the conversation has never

really come up" or "she doesn't ask about it" or "we don't really talk about it because it

isn't part of our life" or "the kids don't even notice race so why talk about it?" Almost all

of the parents in Sheridan indicated to me that they believed their children do not think

about race—their own race or the race of others. When I probed parents on these

responses by asking about specific events involving race such as the election of the first

Black president, I received responses such as this from Alice Chambers, the mother of

two girls:

> If you asked my daughter about Obama, you see, she doesn't even see the big deal of it! You know, they just, they certainly know he is the first Black president, but they don't really think to themselves, "Oh, this is historic" or anything like that. Race just doesn't matter to them. And I think that's really wonderful.

Similar to other mothers with whom I spoke, Mrs. Chambers insists that the racial

component of the election of President Obama does not matter in any concrete terms to

her personally and more importantly to her children. She thinks positively about her

children's lack of discussion about President Obama's race, and she does not indicate that

she has pushed her children to talk about the "historic" element to his election or about

how his race might potentially shape his experience as president. While Mrs. Avery

certainly adopts colorblind thinking when talking to her kids about race, she models

behavior that actually sends more overt and direct messages to her children about the

negative aspects of the black community, ideas, as discussed, that map onto new forms of

racism like laissez -faire racism. And, her children, while more comfortable than other

children in asking their mother questions about race, ultimately receive similar messages

about race. These messages are based on not only on what is discussed overtly within the

family, but also the results of observations they make about the social world around them,

witnessing racial segregation in Petersfield for instance. Another way in which the Avery

children receive contextual messages about race is by attending almost exclusively white

schools, a choice that was deliberately made by their parents.

Contextual Choices: Neighborhood, School and Media

In addition to how parents talk (or don't talk) about race, decisions about where to raise their children, what schools to send them to, and also, what media to encourage them to consume shapes the racial ideas formed by children.

Similar to other Sheridan families, the Averys moved to Sheridan for this one primary reason—the schools. Like, many Sheridan peers, the distinction between families who are perceived to value education and those who are perceived to not value education is very important to the Averys and is tied to ideas about differences between racial groups. The Avery's moved to Sheridan approximately fifteen years ago, before much of the new development and increase in population. They were on the early side of the massive exodus of affluent, white families from Petersfield to Sheridan, coinciding with demographic changes in the Petersfield and the shift from being a predominantly white city to a place with more racial and economic diversity. Moving to Sheridan, though, did not exclude the Averys from considering the array of potential educational options for their kids in the Petersfield metropolitan area, as getting them into the best possible school was a top priority for Mrs. and Mr. Avery. While test scores, classroom size, curriculum and school safety were the priorities for the Avery family, attending a diverse school was not a main concern. I ask Mrs. Avery about the diversity in Sheridan and if she thinks much about it:

> **Mrs. Avery:** Yeah, um, well I would say that the kids don't get any diversity. I shouldn't say "any." They get VERY VERY little racial diversity in Sheridan. Um, uh, but we have a lot of like with working where I do, at the hospital, there's a lot of diversity in all different ways, whether it's race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, whatever their sexual preference is, there's all kinds of diversity, and I think that's where our kids are exposed to it more as to what our lifestyles are about and what we do, um and so they get exposed to a lot of different diversities that way. But through school, not a lot. So we try to take different opportunities to expose them to different things. I think look for those examples to teach them because they are not living it every single day.
>
> **Maggie:** Do you seek out these examples?

> **Mrs. Avery:** We will make a point to when we can. It's a learning opportunity! (in sing-song voice, laughing)

I push Mrs. Avery further, asking her to describe some of the learning opportunities that she has taken to engage with her children in discussions about human difference.

> **Mrs. Avery:** I mean, I tell the kids stories about dependent on the color of your skin, well *The Help*, Alicia and I read the book, we read the book and you know, I have probably more of a knowledge base about that stuff than Alicia does, but both of us were reading the book, just because I was exposed longer and have heard more stories Alicia, not because I'm smarter—she rolls her eyes at me like, yeah right mom. [to daughter Alicia who is listening to the interview.] But you read that book and you're just horrified. You're like, "oh my god! Seriously? That is what they dealt with?" And then it comes out in movie form and we all went to see the movie and some of her girlfriends and there are parts of it where you're mouth is just hanging open because you just can't quite believe what you are seeing um and so from that instance, they will say, "Oh my gosh, thank god I didn't live then! Thank god we live now where it doesn't really matter what the color of your skin is."

Mrs. Avery understands that her children do not have exposure to people of color in their daily life as a result of the contextual choices she and her husband made about where to live and where to send their children to school—and she compares her work experience in the Petersfield hospital with the experiences she knows her children have in the "white bubble" that she and her husband have constructed. Like most parents though, Mrs. Avery recognizes that her children consume media, and in some ways the majority of the "diversity" that the Avery children experience is via their television. Mrs. Avery tells me that subsequently, she uses media to talk to her kids about human difference, like using *The Help* as a way to the discuss racial history of the United States. She believes that inequality is on the way out and as her example of reading *The Help* with her daughter demonstrates, she suggests that the world is now one in which "…it doesn't really matter

what the color of your skin is," distinguishing between "back then" when America was racist and today, when America is no longer racist [9]

Mrs. Avery's messages have clearly been received by her children. For example, when I ask Jacob if he believes that America has racism, his response is similar to his mother's and sister's response to *The Help*:

> No, that was like in the olden days, when slaves were still around and that like bus thing and the water fountain thing. I mean, everything was crazy back in the olden days. But now, I mean, since Martin Luther King, I think everyone's treated equally. I mean, if you buy a ticket for a show and you are in the first row, well, if a different person from a different race is going to buy it, it's not like we're going to get a different price or anything, so I think we are all treated equally"

Here, similar to the example mentioned with the Schultz kids about "Eleanor Roosevelt and how she had to sit at the back of the bus," and other comments like, "After the 1920s and all that, things changed," it is apparent that these kids share a narrative that bad things happened a long time ago but that those times are over. For them, the absence of formal Jim Crow segregation means that racism itself is not longer a reality.

Colorblindness in Action

Despite children like Jacob extolling the idea that race doesn't really matter anymore, in their actual engagement with the world, race clearly still matters to them. For example, twelve-year old Jacob Avery was quite chatty during his interview with me. He talked in great detail about his hobbies, his friends, and his family's recent vacation. However, when asked directly about racial matters, he became much more reticent, either avoiding answering or offering different versions of a short response – race doesn't matter anymore. For instance, when asked if he talks about race at home, he replied, "Not really." When asked if his teachers discuss the topic at school, he said, "Mmm uhh.

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[9] Mrs. Avery also thinks it is positive for her kids, who have a gay relative, to see gay teenagers on television in shows like *Glee* and *Modern Family*.

Nope." When asked if he thinks racial discrimination still happens in the United States, he stated, "the country has moved beyond it." And when asked what he thinks about the election of the first black president in the United States, he responded that he doesn't think it's a big deal because "the color of your skin doesn't matter. Everyone is the same." Yet, observations of Jacob in his everyday life revealed that race really does matter to this child, despite his claims to the contrary.

One afternoon, I drove Jacob home from hockey practice. He asked me if they could stop on the way home at McDonalds for a milkshake, explaining that this was his usual routine with his mother after hockey. As they approached the restaurant, Jacob hesitated and reported to me, "This isn't where we usually go. We usually go to the one over by the mall." I responded that this was the closest McDonalds to their location and the easiest place to stop. As we waited in the drive-through line for his milkshake, seven black children, both girls and boys, walked past the car into the McDonalds. The children appeared to be about the same age as Jacob, perhaps in 7th or 8th grade, and were dressed similarly to him – wearing winter coats, jeans and boots and carrying school backpacks. They were laughing and joking around. As Jacob watched the kids walk past, he said nervously, "This neighborhood really isn't all that good, is it?" I replied, "What do you mean?" Jacob said, "I dunno. It just seems like there are a lot of poor people around here. We don't usually stop here. My mom says it's dangerous." Contrary to his claims in the interview context that "we are all the same," Jacob clearly *sees* race and operates with stereotypes about different groups. Though Jacob lives in Sheridan and knows little about the distinctions between different Petersfield neighborhoods or the people who live in them – he had no idea where we were in town until this moment – simply observing these

black kids walk past my car, behaving much like he behaves with his friends, elicits comments about the assumed quality, class-status and dangerousness of the environs. Here he casually draws a direct connection between blackness and poverty. Other than the color of their skin, the children he observed did not signal "poverty" or "dangerousness" in any stereotypical way—they were dressed well, groomed well, were laughing and appeared friendly and playful as they walked from the bus stop to the restaurant. They were being silly with one another, lugging backpacks and throwing snowballs, and they reminded me of the middle schools kids I'd been interviewing all over the metro area. Seeing these particular kids, however, did not, for Jacob, signal "peer." Instead they caused his demeanor to shift dramatically from jovial to nervous as he expressed concern about where we were.

Jacob's observations indicate that he was thinking about and noticing race in his everyday world, despite not wanting to talk openly about it. The inconsistency in how he talks about race when asked directly (race doesn't' matter; everyone's the same) and how he make sense of race in his everyday life (those black kids look dangerous) maps onto the hegemonic racial ideological position of colorblindness. This disjuncture demonstrates that these claims of colorblindness are more rhetorical than realistic and shows how these claims mask the continuing importance of race.

Jacob was also concerned not only because of the children themselves but because he was aware that his parents typically avoided this space. These kinds of subtle everyday behaviors of parents, such as choosing to drive out of one's way to get to a McDonald's location that is not near a predominantly-black neighborhood, sends messages about race, and in this case, black people and black neighborhoods, to children like Jacob. These

messages are not necessarily explicit—but even avoidance is an active and strategic

practice (Bartky 2002). Over time, these everyday behaviors are part of the architecture

of the racial context of childhood, one which provides the context of racial socialization

for kids like Jacob. Always stopping at the McDonalds near the mall means never

stopping at the McDonald's in the predominantly black neighborhood, which means

never interacting with or having exposure to black people. This choice also sends subtle,

implicit messages to kids like Jacob that imply there is something undesirable about

spaces in which black people in Petersfield live their daily lives.

While the Averys avoid black people and black neighborhoods, blackness remains

a regular referent in their everyday lives in the "white bubble." Months later, in the

summer, I attend a water ballet performance at a pool in Petersfield to watch Lauren,

Jacob's older sister, perform. Swimming is a very popular sport for kids in Petersfield:

many of the state champions come from this area, and many local high school students

getting swimming-based athletic scholarships for college. Local pools are a popular

summer hangout for all local kids, though the big public pools and the small private pools

are very different both in facilities as well as who uses them: the big public pools attract

more families of color whereas the small private pools are almost exclusively white. In

the small private pools like the ones the Avery's use (which is not the same as the

country club pool where the kids also hang out nor the private pool at their house),

families must purchase a membership as well as individual swim, dive, or in this case,

water ballet classes. Some pools also have tennis courts and tennis instruction. Overall,

the pool-related activities for one summer cost thousands of dollars for families like the

Averys. White kids of all ages participate in the pool scene – the high school kids are the

swim instructors, water ballet choreographers, life guards and concession stand workers while the younger children take lessons, play water games and participate in water ballet. Other teenagers and college students are also the babysitters for the younger children, and they sit together gossiping at the side of the pool, occasionally spraying sunscreen on the children, offering snacks, or dealing with exhausted and sunburned children having meltdowns.

Water ballet consists of mainly girls, separated into different age groups, performing a memorized, choreographed dance that starts on the pool deck, includes a acrobatic jump into the pool, and then further synchronized swimming-type movements in the water. The girls wear waterproof makeup to do this, along with matching bathing suits that are purchased for one performance only, decorated in sequins and bows. Each age group has their own specific decorative bathing suit and dance routine. High school aged girls choreograph the dance and teach the moves to the younger kids. These dances are accompanied by music by artists like Lady Gaga and Katy Perry.

Parents sit by the side of the pool, cheering on their daughters, a few parents looking at each other with an eyebrow raised as the kids perform sexually suggestive dance moves in their bathing suits. On this particular day I sit with the parents, a crowd of about thirty people, observing this scene and listening to the conversations. One mom, sitting to the right of Mrs. Avery, with long red fingernails, white linen pants and black platform sandals, is very excited about water ballet: she is not one of the water-ballet skeptics. She sings along to the music, swaying back and forth and clapping her hands, occasionally yelling out, "Wooo!" to her daughter as she shakes her hips back and forth to Beyoncé. At one point, while snapping a picture on her iPhone, she turns to Mrs.

Avery and me and says, "Look at them pretending to have ghetto booties!" Mrs. Avery

laughs and replies, "I know! It's hilarious!" The girls have all turned their backs to the

crowd and are sticking out their "booties." The two women start singing along to the song

together, waving their arms in the air as they move to the music.

After the show, we greet the girls, who are given roses by their parents, and who

are very excited and giggly after an exhilarating water ballet performance. Mrs. Avery

gives Lauren a hug and says, "You girls really looked like Beyoncé out there!" The other

mother chimes in and says, "Yeah girls! You were really shaking those ghetto booties!"

The girls look at each other, turn their backs to us, and repeat the same hip-shaking dance

move they had performed by the pool. Everyone laughs as the girls turn and run off to

retrieve smoothies, purchased by one of the parents for all 40 girls in the performance. I

see them checking each other's waterproof lipstick as they run towards the smoothies.

While no one mentions race in this scenario, the use of the term "ghetto booty" to

describe the way that the girls were dancing, and the laughter that it incites, suggests that

these mothers and daughters alike agree that there is a difference between black women's

bodies—like that of Beyoncé, a popular black musician—and white women's bodies—

and that there is something funny about this difference, especially when a black woman's

body is imitated and culturally appropriated by white children. The connection between

Beyoncé and "ghetto booties" also demonstrates that the term "ghetto" is a commonly

agreed upon term that whites in this community use uncritically to refer to black people,

black spaces and black culture. Generally the term refers not only to blackness but to a

form of blackness attached to poverty. For example, in other instances, Sheridan children

referred to something as "so ghetto," such as a decrepit basketball court or Mrs. Avery, as

documented above, referring to "ghetto talk" when discussing black children's speech.[10]

The use of terms like "ghetto" may seem harmless to the Averys, but they

certainly contain and transmit common-sense agreed-upon, subtle racial meaning and are

employed in ways to denote difference, ridicule, dismissal or apathy towards black

people. And, much like school and neighborhood choices are part of the racial context of

childhood for Sheridan children, so too are the everyday subtle behaviors and talk that

occur between parents and children about topics connected to race. The racial context of

childhood, thus, contains big choices about schools and neighborhoods but also everyday

choices about how to talk about race, directly and indirectly.

Role of peers and siblings

In addition to the way that parents talk about race, both overtly and subtly, peers

and older siblings also co-construct racial contexts of childhood, playing a role in

transmitting racial lessons and "common sense." For instance, one snowy day after

school I play a board game and eat popcorn with the Avery kids. Alicia describes to her

younger siblings and me the day's experiences of her good friend Caitlyn who attends

public school in Petersfield. My field notes describe the scenario:

> Alicia, who is continuously texting with her friend Caitlyn while playing monopoly with
> me, Jacob and Lauren, relays her conversation with Caitlyn to the rest of us. She says,
> "Oh my god, Caitlyn is telling me that she is soooo mad because she couldn't get to her
> locker today because the police were searching the locker next to hers." Lauren looks up,
> interested. Alicia, looking at her phone and reading off text messages, goes on to tell us
> that Caitlyn's locker is located next to an black student's locker and that "he *always* has
> pot in there," according to Caitlyn. Lauren asks her sister how Caitlyn knows that he
> always has pot. "Has she like seen it?" Lauren asks. Alicia replies dismissively, "Oh my
> god Lauren, you are so naïve. All of the black kids have pot on them at her school. You
> don't know anything." Lauren responds, "Well how am I supposed to know? God, you

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[10] In a similar vein, the term "afro" was commonly used negatively to describe unwanted humidity-induced
curly white hair. In Alicia's words, "Ugh. I need to straighten my hair. This weather is turning it into a
giant afro!" followed by Mrs. Avery saying, "Well then go straighten it and stop complaining!"

are so mean, Alicia!!" Jacob says, "Lauren, shut up and take your turn or else I'm not playing anymore." Lauren mutters something under her breath and Alicia rolls her eyes at her sister. Lauren takes her turn and we move forward without further discussion of Caitlyn's afternoon.

In this scenario, Alicia passes information to her younger siblings explaining to them, even sarcastically, what "everyone" knows to be true – "all black kids have pot on them." A quite legitimate question about whether Caitlyn has any actual evidence that the police search is warranted is met with a corrective "you are so naïve" which suggest not only that Alicia has insider knowledge about black Petersfield teens but that this is folk knowledge that even her siblings should have.

Whether it be through conversations with siblings or peers, many of the children in my study acquire racial "knowledge" and develop racial common sense in part as a result of these conversations and sharing of "information." In the case of the Avery children, despite being secluded in predominantly white Sheridan, the relationships they have with white kids in Petersfield helps inform their racial logic. And in the case of Lauren, her older sister's sharing of this "knowledge" about Black kids in Petersfield transmits an unequivocal message that she has almost no likelihood of getting contradicted. Interestingly, even as she initially questions the information, she is told that she is "naïve" and is made to feel stupid by her older sister. Jacob, while expressing little interest in what his sisters are discussing, is also present the conversation and the logic within it become part of the context in which he lives, in this case, shaped by his older sister and her peers.

This same pattern emerged of older siblings "schooling" younger siblings on race-related matters came up in a number of families in the study,. For instance, in one case, a sister told the other that, "you should not call people 'African Americans' because some

black people are not from Africa." The younger sister followed her older sister's lead and during her interview, confessed to me how confused she was and that she didn't know what to call "people with dark skin." In another case, the same older sister told the younger sister that the kids at the public school "were in gangs and did drugs" while in another case, the older sibling mocked the younger sister for admitting that she could not distinguish between Chinese and Japanese people, calling her sister a "racist." Thus, in addition to the physical context of childhood (i.e. segregated white schools and neighborhoods), the everyday behaviors and talk of people living within this context, including parents, peers, teachers and siblings, are another aspect of a child's racial context of childhood. How people talk about race, especially in private spaces like the family home or car, is therefore another key component of a how children are racially socialized.

Avery Kids on Race

According to Sheridan children like Jacob and Lauren Avery, race is the "color of someone's skin" and is derived from either differences in genes or is the result of the "different countries their parents come from." For many of these children, race is still understood to derive from underlying biological differences that shape not only phenotype but a range of related skills. For example, Jacob tells me that he and his friends have a long-standing argument about "black man hops" and if black men have an "extra muscle that makes them jump high." Jacob and most of his buddies believe this to be true, while his one friend is skeptical. Or, as another child put it, "I guess, if you think about it, people of a different race have got something in their blood that makes them different."

When I asked the Avery children how they knew someone was a particular race, they struggled to answer the question. As a way of assisting them in talking concretely about racial classification, I drew upon an activity in which I presented kids with images of popular celebrities. I asked them some questions about the celebrities and then asked them to racially identify them. To my surprise, Sheridan kids did not want to racially classify the celebrities, as they believed this was "racist." For example, the following exchange occurred between Lauren Avery and me:

> **Maggie**: So if you were to see these people on the street, how would you identify them racially?
>
> **Lauren:** Um, okay, so should I just go one by one?
>
> **Maggie**: Sure.
>
> **Lauren:** Okay, so like Zak Efron, ummm, how would I like identify him?
>
> **Maggie:** Yeah, like if he were filling out a form, what race do you think he would check off?
>
> **Lauren:** Probably white? Because…yeah (laughing nervously). Taylor Swift, white. Um, Justin Beiber, white. Um, Taylor Lautner, I don't know if he is just like tan but probably white? I dunno… (long pause)
>
> **Maggie:** When you're doing this, what things are you looking for?
>
> **Lauren:** Um, well, I kinda feel like kind of like racist doing this.
>
> **Maggie:** Why do you feel racist?
>
> **Lauren:** Because I'm just like, categorizing them by the color of their skin and I don't think that's right. I mean, I don't think it's bad but maybe they find it offensive.

Lauren and I go on to discuss how she feels, and I back off somewhat with my questioning as she is displaying discomfort with this activity. The discomfort, notably, is not associated with labeling people "white" but rather with the "other" racial categories. In fact, she skips over the celebrities of color like Rihanna, Tiger Woods, and Sasha and Malia Obama to pick out the white celebrities. Lauren's behavior with respect to this

activity is repeated with a few other children from Sheridan as well. Multiple times, children told me that they were concerned about "being racist" and that by "labeling someone" as being anything other than white is "bad." This finding is not idiosyncratic. For instance, Lewis (2003) finds that children in predominantly-white school environments believe that identifying someone as "black" is perceived to be negative. As Lewis (2003) describes, "These kids and their teacher seemed to understand that, in this case, in this context, to "see" or to acknowledge race (particularly to identify one as black or brown) was negative or, as Mrs. Moch put it, 'derogatory'" (21). Ironically, the purpose behind my design of this activity was to find a productive way to engage children immersed in pop culture (as they all were), meeting them at a place that they would enjoy and find comfortable.

Like the Avery kids, other Sheridan kids almost always designated celebrities as either "black" or "white" and occasionally "a mix of black and white." They never drew upon other racial categories, and they frequently misidentified the names of celebrities of color. For example, when eleven-year-old Abbey Chambers, who is a friend of Lauren Avery, explains to me, "Rihanna is white. I read she uses like bronzer or something so she looks a little darker. But yeah, she's white. I love her." The children across the board misidentified the names of many of the celebrities of color. For instance, often the children identified Sasha and Malia Obama as other celebrities' children, like "Michael Jackson's sons." Most children in Sheridan were unable to identify any of the black men, with the occasional exception of Kobe Bryant. Gender differences did emerge in that the boys were more often able to accurately identify Kobe Bryant. This activity opened the door for many different discussions about race, gender, media, pop culture, class, dating

and with the girls, with lots of giggling, who belonged to the "race of hot," meaning that in addition to identifying them racially they also told me who was "hot" and who was "not." What this activity demonstrates is that like Lauren, many of the children living in Sheridan hesitate to talk about race openly and directly, even children who live in families with parents who are more open to these kinds of conversations than others. Yet, these same children, in other more casual moments, talk openly about race without the same hesitation.

Conclusions

Like all of the children in this study, the Avery children, in part, form ideas about race through *talking with their parents, their siblings, and their peers*. In fact, the Avery family talks about race more openly than other Sheridan families. The mechanisms of this race talk often include bidirectional socialization—that is, the children often bring up the topic of race and Mrs. Avery then responds, rather than Mrs. Avery initiating specific conversations. The children also discuss race between themselves, as the monopoly example demonstrates. The content of what Mrs. Avery says to her children about race, however, is very similar to the ideas held by many other white parents in Sheridan, even those who are reluctant to express their views to me as openly as Mrs. Avery. Specifically, Mrs. Avery insists that race does not matter in America, that the color of one's skin is not as important as how hard they work. Her positions on race connect to new forms of racism, in particular, laissez-faire racism.

When asked directly about race, the Avery children often hesitate and express their fear of being racist. Yet, in other moments, these same children talk casually about race without feeling the same anxiety. For example, sometimes, the Avery children spoke

very openly with me and each other about their ideas about race, such as when we were

playing monopoly together. Yet, when being asked formally, as part of a recorded

interview, these children deployed colorblind ideas and stated that they don't think about

race because "it doesn't' matter." This inconsistency in how the Avery children talk

about race when being interviewed and how they talk about race as they go about their

daily lives demonstrates that while they possess ideas about race, they sometimes feel

uncomfortable articulating these ideas in concrete ways and instead, adopt colorblind

rhetoric when feeling uncomfortable. This behavior, I argue, is learned in large part

through interacting within a racial context of childhood, designed by parents that is

predominantly-white and filled with contradictions.

Clearly then, children's ideas about race also form as a result of their observations

of the social environment that surrounds them—an environment that has obvious racial

patterns in where people live and go to school, for instance. Children's ideas also form in

response to how their parents behave implicitly, such as the example at McDonald's

represents or the discussion at the water ballet performance. And, it seems that the racial

logic that children like the Avery's are forming maps onto the contradictions of

colorblind ideology. For example, I ask Jacob Avery if racism is still present in American

society:

> **Jacob:** I think we have moved beyond [racism]. But like, uh, but like down on the Mexican and American border, I think it is wrong to let illegal immigrants come in without having a green card and steal our money. We work hard in America. They can't just come here and be lazy and take it. But for racism, yes, I think as a country we have moved beyond it.

Jacob uses anti-immigration rhetoric in order to displace any possibility of

continued racial conflict onto nonwhites. This is also one of the only times in which he

mentions a non-white racial group other than Blacks. Yet, his statement is filled with

contradiction between living in a world without racism and a world with "lazy" Mexicans in it. As such, even in families like the Averys where the children have close relationship with their mother and where open dialog is a part of their everyday experience, when asked to talk openly about race, they become fearful of sounding racist, despite talking more openly in casual settings with siblings and friends when they aren't thinking much about it. Their solution when they are put on the spot though, tends to be to avoid the subject altogether by adopting colorblind explanations, as this frees them from any possibility of sounding racist. I argue that children like the Averys form these ideas about race and learn to circumnavigate around discussions about race in the way that they do as a result of interacting within their particular context of childhood. This racial context includes both physical conditions of segregation in white schools and neighborhoods as well as social conditions that include everyday behaviors and talk with other whites around them.

CHAPTER 5: The Chablis Family—Noticing Race in a 'Colorblind' Place

Most members of the Sheridan community, like parents and children in the Schultz family and the Avery family, tell me that racism is no longer a problem in America and that any persistent or widespread patterns of racial inequality can be explained by failures on the behalf of communities of color. Exculpating oneself from bearing any form of responsibility for the racial status quo, these parents and many of their children view America as "beyond race" or post-racial and exhibit signs of racial apathy (Forman 2004).

However, after spending significant time in this community, I witnessed a handful of moments in which children interpreted their context and the behaviors of those within it in ways that contradict and challenge this "post-racial" racial logic and political perspective on race. These examples demonstrate the importance of children's agency to my theory of white racial socialization; specifically, these moments illustrate that children do not simply mimic the attitudes or perspectives of their parents or other adults in their lives. Rather, they interact with and within their racial context of childhood, making sense of the world around them and producing knowledge: knowledge that sometimes maps onto the knowledge of their parents and knowledge that sometimes reworks racial narratives in different/new ways. In other words, while parents significantly influence the idea their kids produce about race, there are limitations to their influence.

Meredith Chablis

Meredith Chablis is a twelve-year old girl with light brown hair who plays competitive volleyball and is a first-chair clarinetist in the Sheridan Middle School

concert band. She loves school and is a diligent student, never missing a day of school for the entire school year. Her favorite subject is English and she wants to be a journalist when she grows up. Meredith is confident and fiery, speaking her mind openly and unapologetically. She refuses to attend Catholic Mass with her family because she "hates it," and she fights with her mother almost constantly about a range of topics. While Meredith is frequently irritated with her family members, she has a close group of friends with whom she spends time with on a regular basis. She is also very interested in talking to me, but she much prefers it when her mother isn't "listening in."

Mr. and Mrs. Chablis own a large newly-constructed, four bedroom, light blue colonial in Sheridan, right down the street from the Schultz family. They chose this home for reasons similar to those of their neighbors: the Sheridan schools and in order to be around people similar to them. The Chablis family is, in fact, friends with the Schultz family, and Meredith frequently spends time with Erica and Natalie while Meredith's younger brother Shane, who is nine, is friends with Danny Schultz. The parents are also friends, frequently dining with each other at the country club in Apple Hills to which they all belong or the private club in downtown Petersfield, where they are also members. Their home is ornately furnished, Mrs. Chablis having a taste for antique furniture and old paintings. A large mirror hangs in the entryway with a thick gold trim, a bouquet of fake flowers below in a large gold vase. A formal living room sits to the right of the entryway, though this room is never used other than on holidays and very special occasions. The children are not allowed to play in there. Meredith thinks this "is a waste" while Mrs. Chablis continues to shop for new pieces to display in the room, frequently attending antique shows in small Midwestern towns surrounding them.

Mr. and Mrs. Chablis, both originally from Texas, met in business school there. They lived in Texas for the first seven years of their marriage, but due to Mr. Chablis's job, they moved to the Petersfield area. Mr. Chablis is a top executive at a major corporation. Mrs. Chablis is currently a Pilates instructor and stay-at-home mom. She is also in the process of writing a book for new mothers. She works on her book a few hours each week. She is also an avid exerciser, participating in Iron Man competitions (extreme triathlons). She also participates in Crossfit and spends a great deal of time thinking and talking about physical fitness and her diet. She constantly reminds Meredith to go running, which Meredith resents.

When the Chablis family moved to Sheridan from Texas, Meredith and Shane were in elementary and preschool, respectively. Their parents chose this community because of the word-of-mouth recommendations of friends and acquaintances, which is again similar to research on school choice like that of Johnson (2006). Mr. Chablis's colleagues suggested this would be a "great place to raise kids" and that it had "the best schools around," Mrs. Chablis tells me. Unlike some of her peers, Mrs. Chablis did not research school options widely; rather, she trusted the word of her husbands' colleagues, did a little looking around, but was very "trusting," which looking back on, she feels was probably not the best way to make such a big decision, but that she believes they "really lucked out."

Meredith currently attends Sheridan Middle School, has exclusively white friends, and participates in activities within the borders of Sheridan. As Mrs. Chablis puts it, "Race isn't really part of my children's experience so we don't really talk about it." She also tells me that "while some people try to play the race card, things are pretty much

equal nowadays." "I guess there will always be those who want something for nothing!"

she adds, laughing. Meredith's parents strongly believe, and have no trouble articulating

to me, that current racial inequalities are the fault of people of color – specifically black

people – and their lack of motivation to work hard and to take advantage of the

opportunities around them to achieve money and success. For example, Mrs. Chablis,

while getting coffee with me and her daughter one morning, describes her thoughts on

food stamps and free and reduced lunch programs, or "handouts" as she views them:

> You know, you have people who are on [low-income state provided health insurance] and
> yet they have the cellphones and the fingernails out to here. (Gesturing to suggest long,
> manicured nails.) They have the designer whatever. And I know that, maybe that's part of
> black culture or because they don't have so much they might want to spoil themselves a
> little bit—I totally understand that, but at the same time, when you, you know, and I go
> back to the same thing. If you can't buy a box of cereal and a gallon of milk, that's less
> than $5, you know? To feed your child—YOU had this child! You had the child. So,
> that's part of being a parent, a mother, showing love. And yet now we spend million of
> dollars as a nation, feeding these children who are going to grow up thinking, I mean,
> how are they going to think? I don't know how long this program has been going on—
> free and reduced lunch—but it'd be interesting to track the kids who have been given free
> lunches, you know? What happens when they grow up? And sometimes, that's their only
> food, so I'm okay with that…but at the same time, the flip side, why can't a mother
> afford a gallon of milk, even when they are given food stamps!? Can't you feed your
> child? That's where I get all caught up with my own, "Why am I thinking like this?" at
> the same time, responsibility, accountability, you know…if the government has to take
> care of your child, then you shouldn't have any more. Because then the government is
> going to have to take care of that child. And then, on and on, you know?

Here, Mrs. Chablis, though earlier telling me that race isn't part of her experience and

that everyone is equal "nowadays," references "black culture" in her discussion of

welfare policy and ultimately argues that moms who receive government assistance in the

form of food stamps or free and reduced lunch are irresponsible, bad mothers who waste

resources on frivolities. She also makes pretty clear her opinions on the politics of social

welfare and her belief in the American Dream: if people work hard and don't spend their

money unwisely on materialistic items, they won't need food stamps. I gently ask Mrs.

Chablis if she thinks kids should go hungry if their parents cannot feed them, the logical outcome of the argument she makes. She responds,

> If you can't feed your kids Maggie, someone else should have them. It's so basic to me, you know? I mean, it's already my tax money that's already going to support all these kids. Maybe people like me should just like, adopt these kids or something instead of giving their parents handouts! (laughing loudly) I wonder what my husband would think about that! (laughing uncontrollably)

Mrs. Chablis and I have this discussion this in front of Meredith, who listens in on the conversation while stirring the whipped cream on her hot chocolate with her pointer finger, occasionally licking the cream off her finger.

Though her mother claims to be colorblind at various points throughout my time with this family, Meredith is exposed to both subtle race talk as well as overt discussion of race and politics by her parents. Her parents both hold strong conservative views and feel that Petersfield is generally a city filled with "naïve liberals." For instance, Mrs. Chablis describes her experience on jury duty to me one late afternoon as we drink white wine together on her patio, without Meredith present:

> I will say one thing about Petersfield, I find kind of humorous sometimes, um … I couldn't believe how naïve some of the people in Petersfield were. (laughing) ... I ended up a few years ago, I was on a jury duty, and it was for a murder trial, which for Petersfield is kind of a big deal but you know, I feel like they are so liberal there, they invite [crime] in, but then they get mad like, "Now there are all these murders!" and I'm like, "You've made it *really* easy for these people to come from the projects of Chicago and (laughing) and you can't have it both ways!' You know, you can't give them everything they want and then turn around and get mad that crime is going up or whatever!"

This perception that Petersfield has "made it really easy for these people to come from the projects of Chicago" connects to the locally-shared commonsense knowledge that because Petersfield is a socially progressive city and is perceived to offer relatively comprehensive social services, families living in poverty are attracted to this place and bring their social ills with them when they move here. In the past ten years, according to

the U.S. Census, there has been a demographic shift in the area. However, this shift is not

the one they imagine. Despite the perception of many affluent whites in the area

generally that the influx is solely connected to the Black community moving to

Petersfield from the "south side of Chicago" and "inner-city Milwaukee, the shift has

been comprised mostly of an increase in the Latino population". Ironically, despite the

fact that Sheridan parents are themselves moving to Sheridan for better public schools,

they are quick to criticize Black families (who they believe are) moving to Petersfield for

better public services and schools. Even more ironic is that Sheridan parents claim to be

"colorblind" yet at the same time, discuss openly the problems with the "newcomers from

Milwaukee," deploying racially coded phrases that all, including children, recognize as

such.

Mrs. Chablis continues with her story of serving on jury duty, expressing her

views more openly and explicitly than other parents in Sheridan typically did:

> We did end up convicting this man who was, who was a black man, killed another black man but but the [other jurors] were just like, "Well that is a big decision! Should we really send him to jail?" and I thought, "He shot someone 12 times! Do you really want him wandering the streets?" (laughing) … and I mean it was just funny because at one point, one of the jurors said something like, because all the witnesses who came in, half of them were in shackles and had been pulled out of their jail cells and their language was quite colorful and so forth and um one of the jurors just said, "I just wish that the people who testified were better, nicer people or whatever" and I'm like, "That's not who would have been where this occurred! I mean, you and I would not have been at that party!!" That's, you know, so just some of that naïveté in Petersfield. I had no problem [finding him guilty] because I felt he was obviously guilty right away, and then you start hearing the same story over and over [from witnesses], and I said no matter how difficult some of these people have had it … there is some truth to it obviously, and you have to take [their account of the story] seriously, even if they have been in jail, (in a condescending, low, voice, imitating how she believes a Black man talks) "This is the 16th tiiiime I've been in jail yo" (laughing) OH BOY! (laughing). Swearing at the judge and you're like WHOOOA-KAY (laughing hysterically and then polishing off her wine)

Mrs. Chablis's dismisses, and laughs at, the other jurors' concerns that they were locking

up another Black man in this state with one of the nation's highest racial disparities in

incarceration rates – or what Mrs. Chablis refers to as their "naiveté." Mrs. Chablis

implies that the cause for racial disproportionality in the criminal justice system lies with

those incarcerated (i.e. black criminality) rather than an unjust system, and she

understands the other jurors as being out-of-touch with reality, which describes generally

her perception of Petersfield and it's residents. To her, it was "obvious" that the accused

man was guilty, and she knew this "right away" and the fact that the other jurors were

hesitant about finding him guilty astonished her. She mocks the general approach to race

relations she perceives Petersfield residents take, reassuring herself that she made the

right choice to move her family away from the city to Sheridan.

Here, we see how the Chablis' political beliefs and ideas about race inform the

choices they make for their family and are fundamental to why they construct the racial

context of childhood that they do. Mr. and Mrs. Chablis refuse to live in Petersfield not

only because of the perceived low-quality schools, but because they perceive it be a place

filled with those who dissimilar from them—not only racially but politically. Aside from

their general aversion to racial minorities, they are also deeply troubled by what they

perceive to be the political perspectives of the other white people who live there—not just

because of the ideas they hold but because those ideas matter in real ways in terms of

local public policy decisions.

Other scholars have noted the key role parental political philosophies play in

process of racial socialization. For example, Rollins and Hunter (2013) note how some

white parents of biracial children make very different socialization decisions at least in

part shaped by how they understand racial dynamics. Some parents believe that the

United States is "post-racial" or colorblind and advocate their own child's self-

development outside of racial identity while other parents advocate a political perspective that "emphasize[s] awareness of racial differences" in order to prepare kids to manage racial bias. This latter approach is more in line with traditional "minority and cultural socialization." The Chablis parents certainly "deemphasize the salience of race or emphasize self-development" in their children. This approach, clearly, does not as Rollins and Hunter (2013) put it, challenge "the symbolic, institutional, and interpersonal dimensions of race and racial oppression" (143).

Political philosophy shapes racial socialization not just in terms of what parents choose to emphasize or deemphasize but also in terms of larger choices parents make like where to live. For instance, Mrs. Chablis cites politics as a reason for moving to Sheridan—to be around people like herself and to get away from the liberals of Petersfield. On the one hand, Mrs. Chablis tells me that she wants to live near her friends and people similar to her. She also makes blatant negative remarks about "black culture" and the "obvious" criminality of the black man on trial. On the other hand, Mrs. Chablis also tells me that she "doesn't see race" and that "everyone has an equal opportunity in this country so race is not a legit excuse." We can see a contradiction here between what Mrs. Chablis says from one moment to the next, a contradiction that aligns with colorblind ideology. Given her strong political viewpoints and common sense knowledge about race, one might expect her daughter to follow in her footsteps. However, this is not exactly the case.

The Liquor Store Incident: Meredith Enacting Agency

While sitting with Mrs. Chablis and thirteen-year-old Meredith another Saturday morning in late fall at a coffee shop in Sheridan, I ask Meredith if she has ever witnessed

an act of racism firsthand. Given the strong, resounding, "NO" that almost all of the other

kids in Sheridan gave me in response to this question, I was taken aback when she said

"yes":

> **Meredith:** Yes…I remember one time I was at [a liquor store in Petersfield] with my mom about a year ago and there was a bunch of Black guys in front of us and only two of them out of the three or four I think, had an ID but they were obviously like 45. But the guy wouldn't let them buy the one bottle of liquor. So they were like, "Oh fine man" and then they left. And then my mom and I were there and she was getting her bottle of Merlot or whatever, and he didn't even ask her for an ID. He was just like "Okay, you're done." And we went outside and I heard them talking near their car about white trash and saying all this stuff.
>
> **Mom:** [interrupting Meredith] Um, but I think when you buy something at the liquor store, all the people that are in your party—
>
> **Meredith:** [interrupting her mother, angrily] Those guys were NOT even standing near the register! And I was with you! And I'm not 21!

Her mother rolls her eyes, and replies in a condescending tone, "Okay honey. If you say

so." This sets Meredith off emotionally; she grabs her cell phone off the table and

stomps off to the bathroom. She is gone for the next ten minutes. Her mother goes on to

tell me that this is just one of her most recent "teenage antics" and that "god only know

what I have in store for the future." She tells me, with a look in her eye that seems to

suggest that she believes we certainly agree on the matter of Meredith's story. "Of course

the cashier wasn't being racist! I mean, come on, you know? How ridiculous," she says.

The particular liquor store under discussion by Meredith and Mrs. Chablis is

located within a large grocery store located in a section of Petersfield commonly referred

to as the "blue collar" part of town. While the prices for all goods at this particular store

are far cheaper than any other store in the metropolitan area, many affluent white mothers

with whom I spoke look down on it and refuse to shop there ("the produce and meat is

just awful!" says Mrs. Chablis; "That's where poor people shop," says Natalie Schultz).

Instead, the food aisles are filled with very young families, families of color, elderly

folks, and college students. Instead of shopping here, the affluent prefer the pricey

organic cooperative market located in the Evergreen neighborhood or the Whole Foods

located in the Wheaton Hills neighborhood in Petersfield.

There is one "acceptable" reason to shop at this store, though, and that is for the

booze ("They are the only place in town that carries this wine!" Mrs. Chablis says to me

as she pours me a glass.) This grocery store has the best selection of liquor, beer and wine

in the entire area, attracting a wide range of customers to the separate and distinct section

of the huge store that sells the alcohol. I paid a great deal of attention to this store

throughout my time living in this community as I quickly, and perhaps ironically,

identified this particular liquor store as one of the most diverse space in Petersfield in

terms of race, class and gender, especially right before a regionally favorite NFL team or

the local university played a football game. Special reserve wine, local micro-brewed

beer, all kinds of whiskey and "Natty Light" or Natural Light beer fill the shopping carts

here, and there is always a long line, even with the new "self-checkout" stands that the

store added recently. People of all kinds in this part of the Midwest pride themselves on

being big drinkers and visiting this store as an outsider leads one to the same conclusion.

Despite having very little contact with people of color or experiences witnessing

interactions between people of different races, Meredith is not only confused by the

differential treatment her mother received in comparison to the black men in front of her

at the liquor store, but she is also angry about it. When she tries to talk about this

situation, especially the racialized aspect of it, her mother "corrects her", telling her

daughter that she misread the situation and that no one was being racist. This causes

Meredith to become even more angry – angry that her mother isn't listening to her and angry that her mom refuses to talk about "that stuff."

Meredith chose to not only share this story about the liquor store with me but to stand up to her mother, both directly and indirectly, when her mother told her she misinterpreted the situation. Later, when her mom is getting a refill on her coffee, Meredith insists that her version of the story is accurate; something "was not right" in that interaction, and she identifies racism on the behalf of the cashier to be the problem. Meredith also tells me that her mom "sometimes is racist and tries to pretend like she isn't….My mom just hates talking about that stuff," she confides in me.

Meredith's comments are similar to those of some of the girls interviewed by Kenny (2000). In her ethnographic research on white, middle-class, eighth grade girls in suburban Long Island, Kenny (2000) explores these girls developing racialized and gendered identities. Throughout her book she comments on the importance of observing the children across contexts over time for understanding their experiences. She finds a pattern of explicit "color-evasion" along with a pattern of color-conscious racial logic. She reports both students echoing colorblind racial logic and also challenging what they perceive to be the racist behavior of their parents. For instance, when a daughter says that her father is "soooo prejudice" because he tells her if she gets her ears pierced she will look "Puerto Rican" (Kenny, 2000, p. 184).

I got a chance to talk to Meredith more in depth when I was invited to attend Meredith's brother's football game one weekend. Sitting next to each other in the bleachers, Meredith and I have a chance to talk without interruption or motherly

"corrections." It is during this conversation that Meredith tells me how she struggles to

navigate the behavior of her mom and her friends when it comes to race:

> Like sometimes when I go downtown [Petersfield] with my mom or my friends, like if
> we see a group of Black people, so um, we, we, and they are all like shouting and loud, I
> don't freak out about it because it's just a stereotype that they're going to jump you and
> hurt you. But some of my other friends, freak out and they are like, "Oh my gosh, we
> need to cross right now! They're probably going to do something!" And I'm just like,
> "It's going to be fine. I don't think we need to move. Just be wary of your surroundings.
> Be aware of your surroundings but don't be a racist! This is like my BEST friends!"

I ask Meredith why she thinks her friends behave this way. She tells me,

> It's just because like they have these like, stereotypes but like, whenever I try to tell
> them, they just get mad at me. It's like, we can't even have a NORMAL discussion about
> [race] without them getting mad at me! It's so stupid. (frustrated)

Interacting within a white, segregated context of childhood like Sheridan, many of the

kids in my study have formed ideas about race that map onto hegemonic, colorblind

racial ideology. Clearly, in this context, it is not "normal" to talk openly about race or to

call each other out on stereotypical actions. Unlike Meredith, for instance, eleven-year-

old Britney Smith, otherwise chatty and open with me, literally shuts down when I ask

her to talk about race:

> **Maggie:** Do you ever hear kids at your school—or do you and your friends ever talk
> about race? Or talk about any of that kind of stuff?
>
> **Britney:** No (very quickly)
>
> **Maggie:** Can you think of any times where you heard other kids like talking about race?
>
> **Britney:** (shakes head no)
>
> **Maggie:** Or making comments that you thought are not very nice about people of
> different races than them?
>
> **Britney:** No. (avoiding eye contact with me)
>
> **Maggie:** So you never talk about race at school or with friends?
>
> **Britney:** No. (shifting in her seat)
>
> **Maggie:** Why do you think that is?

> **Britney:** It's not right.
>
> **Maggie:** So outside of your school, do you think that racism is a problem in America?
>
> **Britney:** No. Like I said before, it's NOT a problem! (frustrated with me, looking around the room uncomfortably)

Not only are race, racism and privilege rarely discussed for the most part in the Sheridan context, many children are very uncomfortable when these topics are brought up – not making eye contact, shifting in their seat, and expressing frustration, both to me as an interviewer, but also to their friends like Meredith who have a desire to talk about race. Clearly, the topic of race, despite not being "a problem" or "part of their experience," manages to still provoke intense anxiety and discomfort.

Like the other children in my study from Sheridan, Meredith is growing up in a segregated, white context. Her parents regularly make negative remarks about families of color (i.e. families moving from Chicago to take unfair advantage of all of the social resources in Petersfield; assumptions about black men and criminality) while at the same time insisting that racism is over (i.e. the liquor store example). Like the other children I spoke to, Meredith is navigating the complicated world around her and trying to make sense of it all. However, unlike most others, she resists the racial common sense that those around her convey. Meredith pushes back against colorblind racial logic, insisting that she can see through its façade—the people around her are decidedly not "colorblind," not matter their claims to the contrary. Meredith pays attention to what goes on around her, thinks critically about what is happening and the power dynamics involved, and creates racial meaning through these interactions and observations rather than simply mimicking her mother's views and perspectives. While none of the children in my study are completely compliant or merely mimic their parents' perspectives on race, within

Meredith's context, her particular type of resistance to the dominant narrative is unusual and interesting. It makes sense that some children growing up in Sheridan would question the dominant perspective that race doesn't matter, especially in the face of evidence that suggests otherwise. This particular example of Meredith illustrates the agency of children to challenge the status quo and rework dominant understandings of race in their everyday lives. In some ways, it is unclear if Meredith's insistence on reading this liquor store exchange the way she does is to contradict her mother directly, knowing that to call her mother a racist would horrify and humiliate her. Regardless, however, she certainly challenges her mother in this moment at the coffee shop and seemingly challenges her friends from time to time.

Meredith's challenges to colorblindness are not a constant occurrence in her life but rather happen in very specific moments. The kind of exchange we had in the coffee shop discussing the liquor store incident is, however, a good example of the bidirectional nature of racial socialization and children's agency: Meredith brings her observations of the clerk's behavior to the attention of her mother rather than vice versa. Importantly, racial socialization is a two-way street. As discussed previously, Hughes and Johnson (2001) argue that parenting, in general, is a *bidirectional process*. They advance understandings of racial socialization by examining not only the parents' behaviors but also by exploring the children's experiences. Similar to the work of scholars identifying with the New Sociology of Childhood and in line with Corsaro's (2011) theory of interpretive reproduction, these researchers argue that parents behaviors are in part a response to what is happening in their child's social and personal world. Thus,

understanding how racial socialization works ought to include the active role children play in these parenting practices:

> "…children are unlikely to be passive recipients of racial socialization messages. As curious, observant, and developing social beings, children are likely to pose questions, comments, and critiques that foster and shape parents' racial socialization behaviors. Thus, more transactional models of racial socialization in which children's behavior and experiences play a role in initiating parental behavior, are needed...Thus, in light of increasing interest in racial socialization, alongside evidence that it has important consequences for children's identity and well-being, it seems important for social scientists to build a knowledge base regarding children's contributions to shaping racial socialization" (Hughes and Johnson 2001).

Research documents that children initiate parents' racial socialization in many cases as a result of the questions posed by a child to a parent. For example, during stages of racial identity development, scholars have documented periods of personal exploration on the behalf of adolescents as they try to define the group to which they belong for themselves (Cross, 1991; Phinney,1990). In addition, exploring racial meaning and defining oneself leads to children, particularly as they transition into adolescence, asking their parents new questions about race and ethnicity (Hughes & Chen 1999).

A second situation in which children's experiences prompt parental responses are when kids come into contact with discrimination and prejudice (Phinney & Chavira 1995). The small body of literature that documents adolescents experiences with discrimination finds that as kids get older and enter into spheres outside of their homes, they are more likely to encounter discrimination; for children of color, these encounters are upsetting and often prompt parents to start sharing more with their children in terms of racial attitudes and intergroup relations (Biafora et al. 1993). While research has not examined the way white children respond to observations of discrimination, certainly this example of Meredith and her mother reflect the fact that it is a moment of perceived

racism on the part of the child (even if not directed *at* the child) that leads to a discussion between daughter and mother.

In addition to the bidirectional nature of white racial socialization, Meredith's experiences demonstrate that while parents, through their choices about neighborhoods, schools and their everyday talk and behaviors, create a particular racial context of childhood, kids form ideas about race through their own, unique interpretation of that context. That is, parents do not merely dictate their children's ideas about race. Rather, their kids, drawing on the knowledge and experiences available to them, as well as the observations they make of all of it, interact within the context in which they are embedded, sometimes adopting similar views to their parents, but sometimes, rejecting these views. Of course, kids like Meredith do not often have the opportunity to be in diverse spaces or leave the average daily context of Sheridan, to talk openly about racial difference or racial disparities, to even be around kids who have had even slightly different experiences than she has: Meredith's peers include kids like Natalie Schultz and Lauren Avery, kids who have grown up in almost exactly the same way as she. Thus, over time, it may be difficult for Meredith to continue to challenge the colorblind ideology widely held by her community. For example, many of Meredith's peers also leave the Petersfield context, but their interpretations of, for instance, black homeless people they see on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, an example often cited by parents and kids in Sheridan, are explained by or interpreted as the consequences of laziness or craziness. However, it is important to note this powerful moment in which Meredith calls out not only the cashier at the liquor store, but also, her mother for reacting the way she does to this event. This moment is important because it shows that Meredith is

independently and actively attempting to figure out the dynamics of a complicated racial landscape around her—one that is filled with contradictions that many people in her life want to ignore.

"We want to talk about it!"

Meredith and a few of her fellow Sheridan peers indicate to me that as a young person, they feel that they "don't really know what [they] could do" to get adults in their life to talk more openly about something as kids, they notice but can't talk about. In particular, they wondered how they could stand up to adults in their lives such as their parents or grandparents who said what they believed to be racist things or what they could do to combat behavior by teachers in their schools that they thought was problematic. For example, Meredith knows about the rule against calling people racist in school: "I think that is dumb but it's the rule," she tells me.

In fact, many of the kids I interviewed, including kids that did not tell me stories about witnessing racism, asked me earnest questions, particularly about racial difference, and even kids like Britney, who otherwise claim that race isn't part of her life. These questions often came up in the kids' everyday lives rather than in the interview context, perhaps where they felt more at ease and under less scrutiny. The kinds of questions I was asked include: "Is it better to say 'Black' or 'African-American'?" or "Do Black kids have to wear sunscreen?" or "Can brown people swim? I never see brown kids at the pool." or "Are there Mexican gangs in Petersfield?" Often times, my response to these questions would be, "I don't know. What do you think?" In many cases, more than one child was present in these moments and a debate between children would ensue over the answer to the question. The debate about whether black athletes have an extra muscle

was particularly popular with Edward Avery and his friends. Other questions focused on black hair (ie. "Do they wash their braids?"), "You-bonics," the meaning behind lyrics in rap songs, how biracial kids understand their identity (and how "biracial girls are always so pretty" and Asian babies "so cute"), and debates over whether "all Mexicans can speak Spanish" or not. In other cases, Sheridan kids would ask me how they ought to respond to a scenario, such as Natalie Schultz's questioning of how to respond to the girls at the slumber party or Meredith asking me for advice for "dealing with my mother." Overall, I sensed and observed that many of the Sheridan children were confused about race – that they know they are not supposed to talk about it, as talking about it is "racist," but they have lots of questions, questions that generally go unasked and unanswered. They also operate within a context in which their parents do talk about race with regularly, though often times in coded and subtle ways.

Some Sheridan kids also spoke to me about how they felt they are not always provided with the tools they need to talk about race. At least four of the children living in Sheridan indicated that they wished their school included a segment on race in their health class, including twelve-year-old Trevor:

> So I think maybe like in 5th grade, we have [Health] but they don't really talk about race. They talk a lot about bullying and stuff like that. So I think maybe if they addressed that…that would be a good thing to do and just have someone who addresses it straight on. Like, like in health class, not trying to make it sound anything other than straight on.

Trevor is not the only child who wants adults in his life to talk about race "straight on" rather than avoiding the subject altogether. Jaime Younker tells me that she wishes she could talk about the racial divide on the fenced playground while Meredith expresses her frustration that "the adults won't talk about anything real with us."

Of course, it should be noted, that the majority of the children I interviewed in Sheridan did not overtly express these views or challenge their parents' or teachers' colorblind racial approach to talking about race. Rather, many of these kids shied away from even talking about race with me when asked or even in more casual, relaxed settings. However, a few kids, and especially Meredith Chablis, articulated their desire for more information, and challenged the logic around them based on the observations they made while living in a world where race really is a meaningful construct.

PART II: EVERGREEN

In Part II of this dissertation, I focus on families who have chosen to live in Evergreen, a neighborhood within the city of Petersfield. Evergreen is an eclectic neighborhood with more racial diversity and class variation than Sheridan. While the neighborhood of Evergreen is predominantly white, it is located within close proximity to a predominantly black neighborhood, with a high poverty rate. Therefore, the public schools here are far more racially and socioeconomically diverse than schools in Sheridan. The neighborhood is comprised of a mixture of affluent families living in homes that cost over a half a million dollars and working-class families or students living in rental apartments. As such, the social geography of this place varies from that of Sheridan.

Parents in Evergreen generally take a different approach to their children's racial socialization than parents in Sheridan. Unlike the colorblind ideology that informs much of what transpires in Sheridan, parents opting to live in Evergreen deploy color-conscious narratives about race. Their decision-making about where to live, what schools to send their children to, where to travel, etc. map onto these narratives and are informed by a commitment to what they often refer to as "social justice." While "social justice" encompasses a range of topics, parents in Evergreen are particularly focused on issues of injustice surrounding sexuality, gender and race. When it comes to racial injustice specifically, I find that Evergreen parents deliberately seek to cultivate what Perry and Shotwell (2007) define as "anti-racist praxis" in their children, or "constant thought and action to dismantle racism and end racial inequities in the United States" (34).

Cultivating Anti-Racist Praxis

As Perry and Shotwell (1999) describe, antiracist praxis "refer[s] not only to direct—action antiracism by whites but also 'everyday' behaviors, from voting to making choices about where to live and work" (34). Antiracist praxis involves constant, everyday, proactive, civic engagement aimed at dismantling racism. Perry and Shotwell (2009) distinguish their notion of antiracist praxis from the term antiracism because antiracism "implies a reactive politics that is not always true of successful practices for social justice. As such, 'antiracism' elides the relational character of 'racism' and 'antiracism': as opposing poles, 'antiracism' is predicated on 'racism,' perhaps precluding nonreactive action for social justice" (34). For example, Evergreen parents think carefully about how their choices surrounding neighborhood, school, who they encourage their children to spend time with, what media their children consume, where they travel, etc. inform their children's perspectives on race. Evergreen parents also engage in proactive antiracist behaviors rather than waiting to react to something perceived as racist, such as an incident at school. They take action to build community and to create for their children a daily environment in which power and privilege are regularly interrogated. While some parents approach this interrogation of power and privilege by constantly and aggressively presenting ideas about justice to their children, or as one respondent put it, "beating it into them," other Evergreen parents take a more mundane approach, normalizing discussions of race into their everyday lives. All of the parents, however, construct a context of childhood that provides their children with a particular set of tools and experiences that aid them in navigating the social world.

Evergreen parents also present their children with different types of racial knowledge. These different types of knowledge also map onto the notion of cultivating an

anti-racist praxis. Perry and Shotwell (1999) argue that three specific types of knowledge must combine with a relational understanding of self and one's group position in order for "antiracist consciousness and practice" to emerge (34). The first type of knowledge necessary is *propositional knowledge*, or "knowledge that can be expressed in and received by words and evaluated by conceptual reason" (34). Within sociological literature, this form of knowledge is often viewed by those studying white racism as "a route to antiracism" (33), influencing, for instance, education programs that aim to teach the history of multiculturalism in America. The second type of knowledge is *affective knowledge*, or knowledge about "race-based suffering" (34) or a "felt recognition of the wrongs of racism" (40). As scholars studying antiracism argue, developing a sense of racial empathy is the basis of antiracist change (Feagin, 2001, O'Brien 2001, Warren 2010). The third kind of knowledge necessary for the cultivation of an antiracist praxis is *tacit knowledge* about racism, or "commonsense" knowledge that is typically invisible and unchallenged. Scholars of whiteness studies have frequently documented tacit knowledge of whites that includes the ways in which whiteness is normalized and how many whites think of their group as "raceless" (Frankenberg 1993, Kenny 2000). Similarly, the popularity of colorblind ideology, an example of tacit knowledge, leads to the rejection of white privilege as a reality; this knowledge thus connects to white opposition of Affirmative Action and other race-based policies (Gallagher 2003). Tacit knowledge about race ultimately shapes how whites think about their own subjectivity. Finally, alongside these three types of knowledge, one must reflect critically about oneself and one's group and develop a "relational understanding" where one is "situated within the complex matrix of power and hierarchy" (Perry and Shotwell 2009: 33,

Hartigan 2005). I find that parents in Evergreen present their children with these three types of knowledge, to their best abilities.

Challenges Faced by Parents

Drawing on this theory of antiracist praxis, I find that Evergreen parents attempt to design a racial context for their children that will offer the tools necessary for their children to cultivate these three types of knowledge and a relational understanding of self. Yet, parents here are faced with some real challenges. For instance, these parents are faced with a conundrum of privilege—how much work is enough? Does extra tutoring provide unequal opportunities to one's child? How does one behave in ways that are truly antiracist while still receiving the wages of whiteness?

Another paradox emerges from the effects of larger structural inequalities in the daily lives of Evergreen children. Some fifty years ago Gordon Allport (1954) argued that for social contact to lead to positive group relations, it must be contact under specific conditions—contact among those with equal status who share common goals, contact in which intergroup cooperation is necessary, and contact that has the support of authorities in place. Many of the children in Evergreen have factual knowledge about the history of race and contemporary racial inequalities and can think critically about their own position in various social hierarchies. However, I also find evidence of the negative consequences of inter-group contact when that contact does not meet Allport's (1954) critical situational conditions. Given the ways in which race and class map onto each other in this community, creating "equal status," for instance, is difficult when the white children here almost always have more economic resources than the black children here.

As a result of structural limitations that make real critical multicultural engagement difficult to achieve, many of the white Evergreen children reproduce negative views about children of color despite their parents' best efforts otherwise. While parents in Evergreen work hard to offer explicit and implicit lessons about race with the goal of providing their children with tools necessary to challenge racism, some of these children reject the messages within these attempts, drawing different lessons from unequal interactions with peers of color outside the home and especially at school. These findings reflect not only the limitations and nuances of inter-group contact and speak to prior social psychological research on this topic but also demonstrate the complexity of and potential contradictions located within even the most politically "progressive" racial context of childhood.

In sum, Evergreen parents only have so much control over their children's lives and experiences. Part of the major challenge these parents face is that there are deep structural inequalities that make equal status contact challenging and many times counterproductive to the goals of these parents. As I will outline in the following three chapters, Evergreen parents are raising their children with the hope that they will develop an antiracist praxis. However, despite their best attempts, these parents must negotiate a context that is at times hostile to the messages and practices they are trying to instill in their children about racial inequality and racial privilege.

CHAPTER 6: The Lacey Family—Constructing a Color-conscious Context

Evergreen is an affluent, predominantly white neighborhood in close proximity to one of the few predominantly black neighborhoods in Petersfield. It is located about two miles from the downtown area of Petersfield. Homes in this area are expensive and eclectic and built very close to one another; instead of well-manicured lawns, there are popular public parks every few blocks. Family-run Vietnamese, Jamaican, and vegetarian/vegan restaurants line the main street along with a gay dance club and a host of dive bars. These establishments are all within walking distance of neighborhood homes, as are multiple large and small businesses such as hole-in-the-wall yoga studios and bike repair shops, the busy cooperative supermarket, complete with an electric car charging station in the parking lot. The community is somewhat heterogeneous including graduate students from the local university renting rooms in old Victorian style homes, wealthy professionals and their families living in large single-family homes, and working-class families renting apartments in the neighborhood. Many social service/outreach offices and social justice organizations are headquartered here, including a halfway house, and almost everyone seems to drive either a hybrid car or a very well-used vehicle. As one respondent told me, "Evergreen is earthy-crunchy" or as another put it, Evergreen is "filled with a bunch of old hippies."

Perhaps the most noticeable characteristic of this neighborhood is unequivocal and unapologetic liberal or progressive political identity of families who live here. Political signs, both professionally made and homemade, litter the lawns of this community, particularly during the time of my data collection in the midst of a major statewide political fight. Neighborhood

cars are riddled with bumper stickers with liberal messages, including reminders to be "anti-racist" and "tolerant" and even ones that read, "Got white privilege?"

The Lacey's home is located one block from the edge of a large lake. The lake helps sustain the Evergreen neighborhood's high property values, especially for those homes located immediately on the waterfront. The Lacey's home is a large, four bedroom red structure, with a somewhat unruly lawn. Two political signs are displayed in the front yard supporting the local unions and the Democratic party. The Lacey's next-door neighbors have a gay pride flag flying on their porch and the neighbors across the street have a homemade wooden sign attached to their house that reads in blue paint, "END THE WAR." An Obama sticker is on the bumper of a well-used car parked in the Lacey's driveway, along with another sticker with a message about environmental sustainability. Inside, the house is jammed with piles of used books, maps, and treasures from around the world. When I visit, the home is clean but not neat with various projects underway around the house including a half-finished puzzle in the living room, a re-potting project involving a house plant that grew too big for it's current pot, homework sprawled across the kitchen table, and Janet Lacey in the midst of making a batch of cookies and washing cherry tomatoes she has picked from her garden, offering me some of both while I am there. The home feels very lived in and loved, a copy of the New York Times laying on the kitchen table, underneath the homework, a used coffee cup from earlier in the day sitting next to it while a pile of various magazines including National Geographic, the Economist, and the New Yorker sit nearby on a side table. Recipe books clutter the kitchen counter and a hodgepodge of old Christmas cards, baby announcements, birthday party invitations, etc., are attached to the refrigerator with a range of magnets, some containing political messages such as, "Well-behaved women never make history."

Mrs. Lacey, a tall, slender woman with short, curly black hair, wearing a long flowing brightly colored dress has the radio tuned to NPR and is multitasking, trying to learn as much as she can about the day's political news at the same time that she rushes around the kitchen to finish her baking and tomato washing so that she can talk to me. She and her husband are very interested in politics, especially the issues erupting during the period of my data collection, a major statewide political argument about how to balance the state budget. Both of the Lacey's, while "moderately" supportive of President Obama, consider themselves to be "social progressives" rather than "typical Democrats" and want to see much more radical social change from government in general. Mr. and Mrs. Lacey are both politically active, attending rallies and protests in their local community and donating money to political candidates who they support and causes they believe in such as wind power programs and same-sex marriage rights. They attended the Inauguration of President Obama in 2009 in Washington, D.C., and they write letters to their representatives as well as editorials to the newspaper, though their success rate of having them published is low. They speak openly about their views on a range of issues, Mr. Lacey warning me that he has "a lot to say about everything" and that I should be prepared to tell him to "shut up if necessary."

Mr. Lacey has an average build and a short buzz hair cut. He dresses very casually, telling me with a big grin that he "likes being a slob." He has a big personality and an even bigger laugh, his charisma and energy filling his work office, where I interview him. Mr. Lacey is a statistician, holding a Ph.D., while Mrs. Lacey is an independent environmental consultant with a Ph.D. in environmental science. Both work at the local university, though Mrs. Lacey sometimes does consulting work for private organizations as well. They have one daughter, Cara, who is currently in 7th grade. Cara is a social, energetic child with light brown hair and intense

green eyes who gets along well with her parents and has what seems to be a close, open, and friendly relationship with them. The three members of the Lacey family eat dinner together every night and also have a weekly movie night where they take turns picking the movie:

> **Mrs. Lacey:** We alternate who gets to pick and I've got the MO for the one who is always picking the documentary. (laughing) um so, you know, I'll say, 'Oh! So let's watch this movie about these two 19 year old girls whose parents are trying to get them to get married because that is what their culture is but now they live in the United States' and that. Or, 'let's watch this movie about these indigenous people in Brazil whose land has been taken.'

Mrs. Lacey goes on to tell me how important she thinks it is for Cara to be exposed to topics such as the ones she finds in social justice-oriented documentaries. She also tells me that Cara enjoys watching these movies and that the family often has lively discussions following their viewing.

In order to make sense of the "social justice" approach to racial socialization that Janet and Tom Lacey take, it is important to understand how their ideas about race have formed over their own life courses.

Background Experiences of Tom and Janet Lacey

Tom Lacey grew up in a working class part of a Milwaukee suburb. He reminisces about growing up there as well as spending time in the poorer, black neighborhoods of the city as a child. Specifically, he tells me about how his father worked at a school in the city that had very different demographics than his predominantly white suburban school; specifically, the Milwaukee city school had a predominantly black student population. Tom would go to his dad's school and spend time with the kids in his dad's school band. "I guess I sort of had that interaction with black folks, the guys in the band were always really nice to us, you know, my dad was kind of a sweet guy and so I think he got along pretty well with folks so I would meet people there," he fondly remembers. Tom was offered opportunities as a child to interact with black peers he otherwise would never have known given where he lived. In addition to attending

school band practice, Tom also spent time in Milwaukee with his grandmother, observing many

of the racialized dynamics of the city while doing so:

> As kids, my grandmother would take us every summer to the art museum downtown…we would go shopping downtown with my Grandma to the little stores, and so that was very racially mixed and in my mind, it was very interesting and urban and cool and we loved it. I paid attention to all the people around us. We loved going with Grandma and she was certainly not somebody who was saying negative—you know, she was cool with us, she wasn't making remarks about people who looked different—we would go and take the city buses, she loved everyone and would talk to everyone, not just white people, and we would have an adventure in the city…so it was pretty positively viewed.

Tom's grandmother not only exposed Tom to the city, but she also modeled positive intergroup

interaction for him. Tom also tells me about a high school romance that lead him to spending

time in impoverished black neighborhoods and in racially-mixed bars and dance clubs in high

school. As Tom puts it, "There were lots of times where I was in black sections of Milwaukee,

and I think I was aware that I was the only white person around but if there was risk, I was

certainly indifferent to it."

Perhaps even more significant to this discussion of Tom's childhood, however, is his

close friendship with Quincy, one of the only black kids at his school and the conversations these

two kids had with one another:

> **Tom:** Quincy and I would constantly—we'd talk about race all the time because it was so, so starkly obvious that he was the only black person around ever all the time and literally, that was it. Everything else was white. There really was a Filipino family with 3 kids and as a result there were more Filipinos than there were black at every school you went to. ONE family! (laughing)

> **Maggie:** What did you guys talk about?

> **Tom:** I think we would sorta make fun of our town for not being diverse and we would laugh about that…I didn't grow up in a family where racial jokes were okay. I mean, we just didn't even hear them. I remember being in high school and realizing at age 16 that there are people out there who had like strong anti-semitic feelings. I didn't even know that existed because my parents didn't make those jokes…But Quincy and I would probably talk about things like um, we probably talked about black and white stereotypes a little bit. We made fun of people for being completely oblivious. And I'm sure we made jokes about that he was going to make other people uncomfortable and it was made funnier by the fact that he was like 4'8 and 15 years old and a senior in high school, so he's a little guy, and he hadn't gone through any big growth spurt. We also just talked about math and school and things.

As Tom describes, he talked about race with Quincy more than with his parents, and it was being in a predominantly white space with Quincy that helped in some ways to facilitate these discussions as the two boys tried to make sense of the racial dynamics surrounding them. Having an equal-status childhood friendship with a black peer offered Tom the opportunity to see and talk openly about what it means to be black and what it means to be white, much like Pettigrew (1998) argues in his work on theories of contact, based in Allport's initial findings in 1954. Tom and Quincy also talk about "math and school" and as he goes on to say, "just normal stuff that teenagers talk about."

Like many of their Evergreen peers, what seems to have solidified Tom's active commitment to projects of racial equality after college, deepening his already developed antiracist racial ideology, were the jobs he held. These early jobs proved to shape the rest of his lives in terms of how he thinks about race but also what profession he decided to pursue. For instance, Tom literally moved to New York City the day he graduated from college. While in New York, Tom worked for a criminal justice agency and later at the poling unit for the New York Times. One of the things he remembers most about his time in New York is his friendships with people of color:

> The [place where I worked] was such a great—when I think of race, it's sort of hard for me to not think about my experience working there—the people I worked with, my close friends at work were Oscar, who was Dominican, Tenesha, who was, I dunno, black from Cincinnati, … Anyway, four people who are black and one person who was Hispanic and me—that was the group of people I hung out with. We had lunch every day, they totally let me into their world in New York, they teased me and harassed me … and uh, I became friends with them and I would go out…dancing at places where there would be 600 people and I'd be one of maybe a dozen white people in the whole club and I would hide behind Jessica who was this stunningly beautiful 5'10 Puerto Rican woman, they'd pick her to go in and she'd drag me in—it was the only way I would get in and uh (laughing) and then we'd go dance for 5 hours and this group of people would take me out so I got to go to all these hip hop clubs and I went out every chance I could, you know?

In addition to their work lunches and nights out at clubs, Tom also spent time in black communities within New York, the only white person in the Sunday softball games and hanging out at the homes of his friends in parts of the city very different from where he lived:

> I'd go to Marcus's house and he lived in Bed-stuy, he lived in a HORRIBLE area and I remember going out there one time—we were at a party and I went out to get some beer and Marcus was like, "why don't I walk you?" and I was like, "No, no, don't worry about it," the idiot I was at 22, and I dunno, I didn't feel at any danger, I didn't think people were going to give me grief, I was probably at greater risk of looking like I was an undercover police officer and getting grief for that than anything else because I looked like a big, naïve, blonde haired blue eyed—I had hair then—and I walked over and got a 6 pack of beer and I remember walking back over and being like oh shit, which house is his? And I had it written down somewhere but I remember looking around and there was a guy on the step who looked at me, not very friendly, and said, "You came from that house, right there." And I said, "Thanks!" (laughing) and I walked in but … No one ever gave me any grief, there was no, as I say, the only time I ever got mugged in my life was in Ann Arbor, Michigan by a crazy Fundamentalist Christian who took my backpack and went running off into the woods yelling, "Jesus give me strength! Help me on this journey!" And I thought, "Who in the hell is that?" (laughing) but in New York, I had no trouble at all, you know. In New York, I had no trouble at all.

Tom reflects on the experiences he had both in a work context but perhaps more importantly, in a social context. He fondly reminisces about the beginnings of friendships that he still maintains to this day, demonstrating deep affective knowledge about race in America as a result as he learned from them about their experiences. "It's hard for me to think about race and not think about how lucky I was to have that experience with that group of friends who let me join them, which they didn't have to," Tom tells me after reminiscing about his friends coming to the Midwest for his wedding. Unlike many parents in Sheridan, Tom models inter-racial friendships to his daughter—real, long-term, long-distance, meaningful and equal status friendships. Tom describes his close friendships as "a privilege" that he was unaware of during his time in New York but that retrospectively had a huge impact on how he thinks about race in America. Tom maintains these past friendships but also continues to form new friendships with people of color. He also encourages his daughter to think about why she is friends with mostly white girls, a point that will be discussed below, both encouraging his daughter explicitly by directly asking her this

question, but also implicitly through modeling to his daughter both the maintenance of old and the building of new interracial friendships.

Based on Tom's interview, it is clear that his white racial consciousness formed in childhood but was solidified in early adulthood as he worked for issues of social justice and formed equal-status, meaningful, loving relationships with people of color. At various points in the interview, he mocks his whiteness, laughs about how "ridiculous" white people are, yet in doing so, he demonstrates that he is very self-aware of his position as a white male and thinks about this frequently—both in terms of his life as an individual person as well as his life as a father.

Though Tom grew up in a white suburb, Janet, meanwhile, attended racially-integrated schools as a child. For her, however, college was when she really began to become active around issues of social justice.

> I went to college at Miami University, which is a public school in Ohio. It's very white; however, I dated a black guy. I was really involved in student government when I was in undergrad, and we in our student government pressured the Board of Trustees to divest during from any companies that had holdings in South Africa and we were the first or second university in the country to do that so that was kind of a big deal. I mean not kind of, it was a very big deal. So I was involved in that. And had a lot of friends who cared deeply about this issue. And it is what started getting me thinking about how I could act, you know, not just have these ideas.

Janet entered college interested in learning more about race and racism and was able to, while she was there not only to learn about such issues in class but to connect with others engaged in social action around issues of inequality. Janet's white racial consciousness evolved further after she moved from a diverse city that she lived in following college to a small white town in Northern Wisconsin, where she was shocked to witness overt forms of racism. Janet shares a story with me in which a news reporter interviewed her for a story related to her job in which she discussed the few people of color in the local community, stating on record how challenging it must be to be a minority in this place.:

> After that was published in the paper, I kid you not, this was in 1990. This was in 1990 in [the Midwest], and I got no less than ten phone calls on my phone from people saying things like, "If you want to hug a 'n-word,' go back to Ohio." I got two letters in the mail with things cut out, like you know like ransom, like creepy notes in the mail on, cut out from magazines saying stuff like, "Fuck you white bitch. We don't need your kind here." This was in 1990...I had people contact me who said they were with the Posse Comitatus—its like a white supremacy group that apparently started somewhere over near Green Bay. So yeah, anyway. That happened.

In addition to her experience with receiving anonymous phone calls, she also witnessed white public officials behaving in ways that appalled her and shaped her understanding about race in America:

> I worked in City Hall, they had a program that was called um, what was it, like Mayor for the Day and the Mayor was a man who had been a fairly elderly guy who had been Mayor for like 35 years, like a super, one of the longest standing Mayors in the country, very bigoted guy. Um, so he's Mayor for the Day, or uh he's not Mayor for the Day, he's Mayor for Life (laughing) There is some little boy. So he's walking up with this little boy who I would say was around ten years old and the little boy is all excited and he gets to be Mayor for the day and so they are coming in and I hear them bantering and I was walking down the hall right behind them going to the copy machine and I hear this little boy say to the Mayor, "While I'm here, my dad wants me to talk to you about those Hmongs. And, you know, those Hmongs, they raise catfish in their basement and those Hmongs, they go and they'll hunt people's dogs and they will eat their dogs and you gotta do something about those Hmongs." Does the Mayor say anything to dispel those gross misconceptions? Not a goddamn thing.

When I talk to Janet about her reaction to these events, she explains that while she knew racism existed and while she already recognized her own white privilege at this point in her life, these two moments stand out to her as life-changing events and were moments that pushed her from thought to action. It was the real life witnessing of racism that deepened her political views, and ultimately influenced her decisions about where to raise her future child and what kind of racial lessons she felt responsible for providing Cara.

In the last decade, scholarship on white antiracism has grown significantly, particularly research arguing for the importance of "the decisive role of affective knowledge—a felt recognition of the wrongs of racism"(Perry and Shotwell 2007). As Warren (2010) argues, these moments are "seminal" and "lead to righteous anger for the very reason that racist practice violates the values of justice and equality with which these people had been brought up and in

which they deeply believe" (Warren 27). These experiences typically involve unfamiliar people

of color being mistreated by a white person and have the potential to change how whites

understand race, sometimes this reaction even being a pivotal moment, or a moment of

"epiphany" for the white person (O'Brien 2001). In the case of Janet, while she has had other

experiences that have also shaped her racial attitudes and white consciousness, these seminal

moments played a significant role in how she thinks about her own racial subjectivity and role in

the world.

> These moments also prompted her to participate in ongoing social activism and learning:
>
> > I volunteer for an organization that does medical mission work in Haiti and I've been reading more and more about Haiti. We also recently went to the Underground Railroad Museum in Cincinnati and being involved with this group and going to that museum and doing all this reading, I just keep thinking wow. We have just screwed over black people OVER and OVER and OVER and OVER again, whether they are people who live in this country or people who don't live in this country. It's partially race and it's partially capitalism. Which I don't think is the greatest system in the world (laughing). Just call me a socialist, I don't care.

Janet's involvement in these organizations means that her knowledge about the history of race

relations in America and the world more broadly is expanding and deepening on a regular basis.

And, this is what Janet and Tom want for their daughter as well: they seek to design a context of

childhood for Cara that is distinct from the childhood they themselves had. In listening to them

talk about their own upbringings and experiences with race, it is evident that they want to

provide Cara with tools in childhood that they did not acquire until adulthood that they believe

are important in terms of working for social change. The need for substantive relationships,

ongoing opportunities for experiential learning, having a sense of compassion and empathy for

others, challenging tacit knowledge, etc., are the kinds of tools and lessons these parents seek to

provide for Cara. Janet and Tom's ideas about race, based on their past experiences, are what

shape how they approach their daughter and her experiences of racial socialization.

Experiential Learning: World Travel

One of the most important experiences the Laceys believe they can offer Cara is experiential learning through travel. The Laceys frequently visit to places across the globe, trips that inform how Cara makes meaning about the world. The previous summer, the family traveled to South Africa and Mozambique, the summer before, to France. I ask Cara about her trip to Africa:

> **Maggie:** How was your trip to Africa?
>
> **Cara:** We went and visited these people that lived in these mud huts, which is cool, and they had one of those schools that is literally, pretty much outdoors but it was weird because their seasons are mixed up so it was summer-winter, winter-summer.
>
> **Maggie:** What was it like being there?
>
> **Cara:** Well, we visited the school and there were all these little black kids, I guess, and they've never seen white people before and of course I've seen black people. But it was kind of like, like sometimes when you are black in a whole white school you feel like everyone is staring at you and it was kind of the opposite, the white person with the black people staring. So it was kind of strange to have that experience because I never had before. And that's how they have always lived with their culture.
>
> **Maggie:** So what was it like for you to have things switched around? Was it different for you?
>
> **Cara:** Yeah! It was kind of weird. I mean, it happens to black people in America all the time. Like, one time, we read this book in school about Joseph Lamasee, have you heard about that guy? He's some guy who lived in Africa, went to school, and then he went to America and how he felt weird because he had never seen all these white people but then it was kind of the opposite for me. That feeling where everyone is looking at you like, 'I've never seen that kind of person before'

Cara and I discuss her trip a bit further, the racial difference between herself and the majority of the people with whom she interacted while in South Africa and Mozambique clearly shaping her entire trip in impactful ways. Her parents really enjoy traveling for their own enjoyment, but also because they want their daughter to learn about the world. The Laceys deliberately work to provide experiential learning opportunities for Cara, a form of explicit and intentional political and racial socialization. As Janet Lacey explains to me, passionately:

> I want to teach Cara that you need to respect that your knowledge and your experience is limited and so it's important to ask questions and not make judgments just on a wee bit of information or one experience. Travel is really important to both of us for this reason – we like to expose her to

different things through [travel]. She's been to South Africa and Mozambique and France and all over the US so, um, not for a long period of time but you know, she's seen all kinds of stuff in all of those places and all different cultures and you know, it's *really* important for her to be exposed to these things.

Tom Lacey also explains why he believes it is so important for Cara to travel, not only for the exposure to other cultures but to shape how she understands her own position in the world:

> I watch how she behaves in school and I ask the teacher how she treats people, and she has a certain, you know, a certain knack of keeping an eye out for people and taking care of them … I think she has a sort of disposition for that and when you have that, then you're thinking, why are they in these situations, why are there—I mean, she sees that people's lives are harder than hers and of course we've traveled and seen that and I remember, its like, that light goes on in your head and you're like, wait a minute! These people are living, these babies, these children that we are seeing in this tiny little village in this country, they are poor because they plopped out of a mother right here. If they had plopped out of my mother back in [Petersfield] they'd be thinking about that trip to Paris they want to take someday and they'd be going to school and going shopping for clothes—they just happened to be born here and uh, and I talk about things like that with Cara.

Tom tries to put privilege into terms that his daughter can understand, drawing connections between Charlotte's desire to go clothes shopping and hanging out in Paris with what her life might be like if she were born in a "tiny little village" in Mozambique. This again is an explicit and deliberate attempt to convey particular messages to his daughter about privilege and position within social hierarchies.

Everyday Decisions and Talk

In addition to travel, Tom tries to convey messages to his daughter through talk and through experiential learning. These are lessons both about her privilege, but also about society more generally. For instance, Tom describes the everyday discussions he has with Cara:

> I will talk about my own life…your dad works hard and he tries to do a real good job … but he's had a mixture of hard work and a lot of very lucky circumstances. I didn't sit around growing up wondering if I could go to college—I *knew* I would go to college. That is *very* different than a lot of people's experiences in the world, you know, even here in the United States and it's like when you have that – BOY, it's a lot easier…I'll talk with her about it…No matter what horrible thing you do, we're going to be here to help you get out of it. And that's, it's hard to imagine what it's like to not be in that situation, you know? That's what we talk and talk and talk about.

Much of Tom's conversations with his daughter are centered on encouraging his daughter to recognize her unearned privileges across multiple dimensions, especially social class, and to challenge commonly held beliefs, or tacit forms of knowledge, about dominant ideologies such as the American Dream. Similarly, many of the Laceys' parenting choices are informed by this priority of getting their daughter to cultivate a relational understanding of self and her group position (Perry and Shotwell 1999). In fact, the choice to live in this part of Petersfield altogether is due, in part, to their desire, as parents, to raise their daughter in a diverse community.

While the immediate neighborhood of Evergreen is not particularly racially diverse, it is diverse in other ways: many LBGT families, graduate students, housing coop members, hippies, interracial families, adoptive families and halfway house residents live in this community. Additionally, Evergreen is located within close proximity to a predominantly black and impoverished neighborhood. While interaction between these two places does not occur frequently in the neighborhood, the children who live in these two places attend the same public schools. Thus, the school that Cara attends is racially integrated and the neighborhood in which she lives offers some racial diversity. This is a fact that Janet explicitly states she wants for their child:

> I like that my daughter sees black people in our house and on our street. We have friends who are black, and we have friends who have adopted from Ethiopia and another neighbor from Guatemala. And you know, in this area, there's a fair number of gay and lesbian couples so she's used to seeing that. It's just integrated into her life. Like in Kindergarten, she was a flower girl in a lesbian wedding and I remember being at the bus stop afterwards and one girl was saying something to another girl about how "girls can't get married" and Charlotte's like, 'Oh yeah they can! Girls can marry girls and boys can marry boys. I was there and I saw it and two girls got married!' She also sees a lot of people with piercings, covered with tattoos, so she's just like used to all these different kinds of people.

Janet tells me that she likes living in this neighborhood for the fact that by doing so, her daughter will be exposed to people who are different from her. Her remarks about how diversity is

"integrated into her life" suggests that beyond just noticing the human difference around her, it is

part of her everyday reality. Tom, too, shares a similar view to his wife, telling me that above all

else, he likes this neighborhood because of the shared political beliefs held across Evergreen

altogether and the presence of diversity:

> I think the diversity was one of the things we liked the most—we liked the idea of [Cara] going to
> a school that wasn't like the school I grew up in. So I mean on that level, there is a certain
> consciousness. I mean, the question when we had friends who were sending their kids to
> alternative schools and things like that, I think we were nervous though we liked, what I would
> call the less factory school and the more creative inducing Waldorf schools, I think we were
> nervous about sending her to a school where it was just a bunch of upper middle class white kids.
> So, I have to admit that while I didn't want to live in a bad neighborhood—and that has a
> mixture, I know crime and economics go together more than crime and race from studying
> crime—so I guess I was saying I did not want to be in a high crime area and I wanted to feel
> leisurely. We like the neighborhood because we are near the lake, we can walk to all these
> restaurants, you know, we could walk to places, we like the politics of the people there. You
> know, there are just a bunch of things. People are outside all the time so you're seeing people out
> and talking and interacting so that is what drove us there, but we did like that the school was
> mixed. We liked that Cara would go to a school that wouldn't be a bunch of rich white kids, and
> uh, and so that was an appeal, and I remember, like I said, when we thought about those other
> schools, we consciously thought, "god I'd love for her to have that experience," but I don't know
> that I want her to have that super white-bred, sit around with a bunch of you know over-
> achieving, you know, wealthy white Americans, having them as her entire base of everyone she
> knows. That made me nervous. So coming to a school that had more racial and economic mixes
> was appealing.

While Tom and Janet tell me that they speak openly about their politics within Evergreen, the

ideal of living near people with similar political views is not unique to Evergreen. In comparison

to Sheridan, for instance, while Sheridan folks believe that they share these views with one

another, in most cases this is taken for granted and not openly discussed. I ask Tom why it would

be so "appealing" to be in a school with such a mix, even more than perhaps a Waldorf school or

some other school that many parents view as superior to public school options:

> I feel that in my upbringing… I liked being on the edges of lots of different groups of people…
> I'm probably deluding myself here—but it seemed like it made me a better sort of rounded sort of
> person. And it made me more empathetic to people… I think you grow as a person by getting to
> know different people…and it makes you hopefully understand and be more thoughtful about the
> types of things that people consider and care about or don't care about and I don't know how that
> can't make you a better person (laughing) I mean, that sounds sort of silly but it's like, but that
> should help you. It should help you be a kinder human being and to be more thoughtful about
> different kinds of people and that means not just the color of their skin or their family background

but sort of what generation they are or income in the United States, in terms of their finances, you know…I have some hostility towards people of great wealth who, who think that they somehow deserve it. …but that's why I want Cara to have that [exposure to diversity] so it's not like my upbringing.

In addition to wanting his child to cultivate critical tacit knowledge about racism, Tom also encourages Cara to form affective knowledge. Tom expresses his desire for his daughter to learn about other people, to be able to empathize with others who are in different positions than she is, and to be able to cross social boundaries or "divides" that separate people from communicating and interacting with one another. He connects this to politics and the polarized nature of current American politics, offering self-reflective and even self-critical comments about his own approach to engaging (or not) with others, in his case, the very affluent who refuse to acknowledge their unearned privileges as well as the almost entirely liberal community in which he spends the majority of this time. Notably, Tom, while perhaps not as wealthy as Mr. Chablis living in Sheridan, is affluent himself and certainly in a position of class privilege and race privilege himself, which he acknowledges at various moments during the interview.

Janet too believes that good things come from spending time in diverse spaces. She reflects on how other parents she knows in Petersfield refuse to send their children to Evergreen High School. Cara is only in 7th grade, but her parents have determined that she will attend Evergreen High, the school many Sheridan parents (like the Schultzs and Averys) avoid. Janet and I discuss this point. "Being exposed to things will give you skills and experiences. Exposure brings more understanding and growth than sheltering does and so, you know, I'd like to have the kids be more exposed than sheltered," she tells me. When I ask Janet what kinds of things she thinks Cara is being exposed to that she wouldn't otherwise, she explains that Cara has exposure to both racial difference as well as class difference, but specifically, poverty. She goes to explain that it is sometimes confusing to Cara because she notices that it is the black and Latino kids who

are also the ones who are poor. As mentioned earlier, given the social geography of Evergreen, when Cara goes to school, most of the children living in wealthy households are white while most of the children living in impoverished households are black or Latino. Janet tells me that she wishes Cara could be in an environment where this pattern does not hold true. Janet also describes the challenges children growing up in poverty face and how these challenges manifest themselves in the school environment. Janet is especially worried that given the way race and class map onto each other, Charlotte's intergroup contact at school will reinforce rather than rework dominant racial stereotypes she and her husband are seeking to resist reproducing in their daughter. But, despite these concerns about messages Cara may pick up at school as a result of broader inequalities, Janet is committed to "staying" in public schools:

> If we are not going to keep our kid in, who is going to keep their kid in? Seriously. You know, if this is stuff that we think is important, if we don't do it, who is going to do it? So even if it feels a little scary sometimes, you know, we have to carry on.

Like Tom, Janet believes that the good outweighs the bad at the Evergreen public schools and that the schools can only be improved if families with economic resources stay in the schools rather than moving away, opting for private schools or attempting to "open enroll" at another school in the city instead. Subsequently, Cara attends Evergreen Middle School and is very happy there, her parents are committed to supporting the public schools, though admittedly having some concerns about not only the educational experience Cara is getting at these schools but also the racial dynamics at the school, which will be discussed below.

Concerns about Cara

While the Laceys try their hardest to expose their daughter to positive experiential learning about human diversity through travel, open and informed conversations about privilege, and exposure to peers who differ from Cara in terms of race and class, they also tell me about the concerns they have with respect to their daughter's racial socialization. For instance, a moment

that both Janet and Tom mention to me separately is their experience bringing Cara to President

Obama's Inauguration in 2009. They describe how moving this day was to them but also express

concern about how their daughter interpreted it. Specifically, they tell me about how surprised

they were that race was not central to Charlotte's experience at the Inauguration as it was for

them.

> **Janet:** There was such a mix of people there and there were a LOT, a LOT, a LOT of very old black people who were there…it was so powerful, so powerful. Just to be in the most integrated event, yeah probably the most integrated event I have ever been to…it was so amazing to have our daughter there. I don't know that she understood all of the significance of it, but it was powerful. And I know she witnessed this moment, and that is powerful. Even if she didn't recognize that at the time.

Tom too reflects on what it was like to bring his daughter to the Inauguration and how

interestingly, Cara did not mention race in her write-up on the event in the local newspaper,

something Tom wrestled to make sense of:

> Cara wrote up a big thing for the newspaper about this and she never mentioned that he was black, she never mentioned all the black people there, and it was one of those things where we weren't supposed to touch it. She was supposed to write it and all we did was put in 3 periods and that was it. And she never mentioned anything about race in the entire thing. And I remember thinking, and of course, Janet and I have tears streaming down our face, we cannot believe that there are hundreds of thousands of black Americans out here celebrating this day. It was unbelievably moving to see disenfranchised people, come out, largely, god knows they must have been excited, and there are tons of them that came out for this thing, and we were thinking, "what an amazing thing" and Cara didn't even write a word about it. She didn't say, "oh! Look at all the black people!" or anything. Nothing like that happened at all because of course, she's not thinking about it in the same way we were.

While Janet and Tom brought their daughter to the Inauguration of the first black president in

America, Charlotte's response to the day was different than what they seem to have expected.

Tom recognizes that his daughter has grown up during a different time period than he did, but he

almost seemed concerned when telling me that his daughter did not mention race in her write-up.

While tempted to "touch it," he left her writing alone and did not try to influence what she wrote.

However, he tells me that he still wonders about why Cara did not mention anything about race,

questioning himself retrospectively as to whether he should have pushed her to think more about it.

Tom spends a lot of time thinking about how Cara understands race, analyzing and observing her behavior regularly, and reflecting on his role in her racial socialization. For instance, Tom worries about why, as Cara has entered middle school, her own childhood friendships with Black girls seem to be disappearing:

> I've been watching and I feel like when Cara was younger, I sort of wonder if there is an age where suddenly—is it just Cara? I've heard this from other parents because I've been asking about it—but it seems like at some point there is more [racial] separation that has been taking place. I think, 'who do I know of the people who she is friends with who I used to see more of that she doesn't now hang out with?' It's hard to know what goes on when we're not around, but I'll say things like, 'Hey! Why don't we go to see this person or that person?' I suggest other friends because she is complaining about being stuck in the house….

Tom struggles to figure out what is going on in the social life of Cara and how she is making sense of the world around her. He is very invested in intervening in her life in whatever positive way he can to help her navigate middle school such that she develops a wide range of friends – not just, as he puts it, "the three white girls on the block." Tom does not want to control his daughter's behavior and is concerned about coming off as such. But, he also feels that he ought to encourage her and ask her questions that make her think about her choices given how "easy" it is for Cara to just get caught up in an all-white social circle. Tom talks about significance of his early friendships with people of color and how that completely changed his life and how he thinks about the world. He wants the same for his daughter, and encourages her to form and nurture existing friendships with specifically black girls at school. Tom's statement of "I've been watching" indicates that Tom thinks a lot about the racial dynamics within the environment in which Cara is growing up. And while perhaps Tom is the only parent who openly tells me that he wants his child to be friends with the black kids at school, it seems that many other parents in this neighborhood hope that by opting in to the public schools, these kinds of intergroup

friendships will follow. And, in most cases, this is true. Almost all of the children interviewed cite a child of color as one of their closest friends. However, as Tom suggests, perhaps these friendships will shift as the kids approach high school, a space that is racially integrated but has many of the problems found in urban schools such as tracking, racialized discipline patterns, etc. (See Lewis and Manno 2011).

Cara Lacey's cultural routines and everyday talk take place in a context of childhood that has been designed by her parents to include a variety of experiences that expose Cara to cultures and people different than her such that she can recognize the many race and class privileges she is afforded, simply by being born into the social position that she is. This exposure is not intended to be "shallow"—rather her parents want her to have an appreciation of human difference such that she can recognize her position of privilege and work for social justice. Her travel experiences, her neighborhood, her school, her parents' friends and past experiences, the topics her parents discuss with her, the stories they tell, the things they notice in the world and talk with her about, and the attempts they make to lead her in the direction of a critical race and class consciousness comprise Charlotte's context of childhood. Cara lives in this context, interacting with people and ideas that are within it, producing racial knowledge as a result. And, the knowledge that Cara produces, varies significantly from the knowledge produced by children growing up in other contexts.

Cara on Race and Class in America

Cara has a friend over when I arrive to interview her, and she is very concerned about how long the interview will take, as she wants to return to her friend. I am conscious of this as I interview her, though as we get deeper into our conversation, she takes over, talking and talking about race and her observations, eventually telling me she "really likes talking about this stuff"

and seemingly forgetting about her friend, so much so that in time, her friend eventually ventures

downstairs to see what is going on. We begin by talking about her school and neighborhood. She

describes where she lives:

> **Maggie:** So if we could just start by you telling me a little about your neighborhood and where you live?
>
> **Cara:** Um, like race-wise or just in general?
>
> **Maggie:** Both is fine.

While all of the kids in this study knew that we would be talking about race at some point, Cara

immediately, without my probing or asking follow up questions, offers a discussion of race,

evidence that this topic is something she can discuss with ease and little discomfort.

> **Cara:** I live really close to my middle school and my middle school is connected to my elementary school but the people that go to middle school come from other elementary schools too. There's a market about a block away from my house, which is where people like to hang out after school. A lot of people, some people who don't live around here, they still go to my school, they'll um walk up to… the community center where people can go after school and there's like, there's like, I know this seems kind of weird, but there's like more unsafe neighborhoods that you kind of hear about like right near here and um like you know, people talk about or whatever, but I think my neighborhood is pretty, I dunno, safe I guess. It's kind of hard to describe. But um, then some other neighborhoods, you hear more things about, people talking about what happened and stuff.

Here, Cara immediately starts talking about "safety." Her comments about "more unsafe

neighborhoods…right near hear" show that she is using "safety" as a code word to signal the

black neighborhood nearby. Though in many ways Cara is far more equipped to talk openly

about race than many of her Sheridan peers, in this moment she still casually relies on commonly

accepted racially coded language in referencing the black neighborhood. This highlights some of

the challenges of raising a child in a place where race and class map onto each other so closely,

even when actively attempting to work against these kinds of ideas. This also demonstrates the

pervasiveness of tacit racial knowledge—knowledge that is so commonplace and everyday that it

is reproduced without much though, even by a child growing up with parents who strongly resist

these ideas. I continue by asking Cara what people say about these other neighborhoods

perceived as "unsafe":

> **Maggie:** Like what kinds of things do they say?
>
> **Cara:** Well, kids'll talk about, some people will be like "Oh, I heard this guy got shot or this person got raped or whatever" But like, I'm sure some of them are lies but some are not, but my neighborhood usually, you don't hear about that stuff. But you hear about the neighborhoods that are more on the outskirts that you kind of hear about.

Growing up in an affluent neighborhood that borders a predominantly black and impoverished

community is meaningful in that while Charlotte's rarely leaves her immediate surroundings, she

interacts with children who are growing up in a very different kind of neighborhood than hers.

Listening to the kids at school, though somewhat critically suggesting that some people "lie"

about goes on in their neighborhood, she is exposed to the reality that her classmates have a very

different experience when they go home than she does, despite living only a few blocks away

from each other. I ask her about the racial makeup at school and what the racial dynamics are

like given that her school is comprised of white affluent kids alongside black and brown kids

living in poverty, without much variation between these groups.

> I'd say it's actually pretty even between caucasian and black—there's a fair amount of Mexicans, er, Spanish-speakers or whatever but it seems like, it seems like our school compared to the other middle schools you hear about, it's pretty mixed. But I'd say racially wise, and I guess people are a little divided by race by who they hang out with, but like, I don't really, I think it's kind of unintentional in a way? Like, I don't think people like think, "Oh I'm purposely hanging out with people of the same race as me" I think it might have to do with where they grew up, like what neighborhood because neighborhoods are divided by race so I think maybe if you live by these certain people, you might hang out with them more and then usually neighborhoods aren't mixed.

Correcting herself from "Mexicans" to "Spanish-speakers," while seemingly a small linguistic

move, reflects the fact that she has been taught, as she tells me later, to not make assumptions

that "just because someone speaks Spanish, doesn't mean they are from Mexico." Cara also

speaks openly about the racial divide at school, though she draws on the use of diminutives to do

so: "people are *a little* divided" and "I think it is *kind of* unintentional." [Bonilla-Silva (2006,

2013) has a discussion in Chapter 3 of *Racism Without Racists* about the use of diminutives by whites.] Cara thinks that the reason kids are divided up into cliques at school that are often shaped by race connects to the neighborhoods in which kids grow up. She recognizes residential segregation in her comments, noting that "usually neighborhoods aren't mixed."

I ask Cara about whether kids talk about race at school, and she tells me that yes, race frequently comes up, though usually in the form of either teachers giving history lessons or in the forms of "jokes" between kids of different races. In terms of history, Cara tells me about her experiences learning about race at Evergreen Middle School, telling me that her teachers could do a better job talking about the "emotional" side of race rather than just the "historical" side of race, and that teachers should talk about racism today rather than just in the past:

> **Cara:** We learned about segregation and Jim Crow in school but I never think, *I don't think the teachers really addressed how not to be racist today, like I don't think that ever came up*, especially to the white kids. I'm sure they are against it, but it doesn't seem like they address it as much as they could. I remember once, I think it was 6th or 5th grade, we watched some video about some school that was like the first blacks to join a white school, I forgot where that was, somewhere in the South, and we heard these people that were talking about race and stuff. So I think [teachers] address it more historically than like emotionally or like in terms of today, you know?
>
> **Maggie:** Do you think they should do more talking about the emotional stuff or stuff that's going on today?
>
> **Cara:** Yeah. I think it'd be good but I think it's a hard thing to talk about so that's why they don't. I think it would be hard for them to explain. Like, we have health class in 6th grade and 8th grade, not in 7th grade, but they address some things like pregnancy prevention and it's boys and girls but I think it would be better, they should definitely divide it up boys and girls because like same with health class. I don't think anyone's REALLY going to talk about it or health class or stuff like that… So like with racism, I think they should have some kind of similar class where people talk about stuff but I think, I think, I think it's hard because people don't really want to say everything they are thinking about in front of everyone because a lot of people would be judged. Like I know in our class this year, we were going to talk about, we each got certain parts of Africa. And in some part of Africa, I forget where, she put us in groups, they had some kind of segregation like in America and this girl, she wanted, they were doing this play, and she had to act out, pretend to be one of these people was against black people but she didn't really want to do that because she didn't want to seem racist or have people call her racist so I think in a way, white people do NOT want to seem racist because then people will call them racist. So I think people really like don't want to make people feel offended because they might say it when they aren't around those kind of people, but some people like, they just don't want, they don't want

people to think they are racist or they don't want them to be offended. So maybe they should divide the class up.

Based on Charlotte's comments here, it seems that not only is there an absence of affective knowledge or "emotional stuff" in classroom conversations related to the history of racism in America, but also a lack of adult leadership on how to navigate these complicated and challenging issues. Children like Cara want to talk about race at school, but they do not have the support necessary by their teachers in order to make sense of their lives as white children in a racialized society. In other words, unlike in Sheridan where children tell me that very little multicultural content is presented to them at school, in Evergreen it seems that while some content is presented, there appears to be a lack of real multicultural engagement with this material. In terms of racial socialization then, though Cara develops affective knowledge about racism in arenas outside of school like when she travels or watches documentaries with her parents, the place where she spends the majority of her day seems to be void of this type of knowledge or engagement despite her desire to engage more fully in discussions about race. As a result, it seems like kids like Cara and her white peers, despite having parents who attempt to help them cultivate an antiracist praxis, experience emotional discomfort and unease at school when it comes to talking openly about race or when asked to act out a role in a play connected to what I presume is South African Apartheid and shut down. Thus, despite parents' best attempts to talk openly about race and to construct an everyday context for their child that is racially and socioeconomically diverse, it seems that parents' messages are not reinforced at school and that rather, the school environment is counterproductive to their work at home, perhaps even hostile to the messages provided at home.

Drawing on her experience in health class and the discomfort she noticed her peers experiences as a result of being in a coed environment for those discussions, Cara contemplates

how a class discussion on race and racism might look if the kids in the class were divided up by race, suggesting that perhaps this could be a space for white students to talk about their fears and insecurities around coming across as "a racist." I ask her why she thinks white people are so concerned about seeming racist. She explains:

> Well, I think they don't really want to be perceived as a snobby, white kid, you know what I mean? …they just don't want to be perceived as those kind of kids who are rich and can say whatever they want. And there are some kids like that. But yeah I think, and people don't always talk about race but also like money…Money and more like what clothes you wear, what kind of phone you have, stuff like that.

Cara tells me that the divides at her school, as well as the tension between kids, is not only about race but also about class differences. Race and class get conflated at her school, yet her teachers do not want to talk about this reality. Nevertheless, this reality has a meaningful impact on how the children at the school make sense of the world, and the adults in the school avoid these hard topics. She tells me she wants her teachers to talk more about race and class differences. Cara and many of her white peers want to learn how to navigate race at school. This is particularly true, Cara tells me, because white kids notice and feel uncomfortable when their black peers are not "treated right" by teachers. White children at this school notice racialized patterns in teacher behavior, but what can they do with these observations? For instance, Cara describes how the school rules include "not wearing hoodies up" or bringing your backpack with you into class and how she thinks these rules are "racist" because "hoodies up" are "associated with the black kids." She tells me that the teachers never tell her to put her hoodie down when it is up but that they always tell the black kids. "It's like they think they are 'ganstas' or something," she tells me. Yet, no one will ever talk about these patterns "honestly," as she puts it. Despite the thoughtful and deliberate attempts by Janet and Tom Lacey to present their daughter with ideas about race that challenge the racial status quo and to present Cara with the tools necessary to take action against racism, these messages and objectives are not supported by the school environment in

which Cara finds herself. Rather, Cara observes white adults demonstrating racism in practice and avoiding discussions of race and class, topics that are hard to talk about and are therefore ignored. Thus, despite the fact that the Lacey's have constructed a context of childhood that they hope will cultivate antiracist praxis in their daughter, Charlotte's experiences at school are counterproductive and perhaps even hostile to these attempts. Cara continues by telling me about school rules and racialized patterns in how they are enforced:

> Teachers only care about the rules…and they don't revise the rules, they just stick with what it was before so they don't really think about it…like if you're late for class you have to get a pass in case you were fooling around but if people are only a few seconds late, they still make you get a pass which is like such a waste of time. I notice they ALWAYS make the black kids get passes if they are late. Sometimes I can get away without getting a pass though….Also, for getting late to class, you're not allowed to go to the bathroom in between breaks in class. You CANNOT leave because maybe they are afraid of someone just walking around the hallway or whatever but it's hard because it's like they don't want certain kids in the hall during class periods.

I follow up by asking Cara about what kids she thinks the teachers are trying to contain in the classroom and she responds, "Well, honestly, it seems to be the black boys. I mean, some of them are definitely pretty rowdy, and maybe I'm just reading into it too much but (pause) yeah." In this moment, I observe Cara qualify her response to me. Her gut tells her that her teachers are demonstrating racism in action; yet, she questions whether or not she is "reading into it too much." Cara has been given the tools she needs to notice and challenge racism by her parents as a result of their color-conscious and antiracist approach to racial socialization. Yet, she doesn't take action at school in part because she doesn't want to cross the teacher, but also because the classroom environment is not conducive for honest, open discussion about race. Rather, what happens at school seems to be a rejection of the antiracist socialization objectives of the Laceys. Instead, teachers seem to pay lip service to multicultural education through their plays and various assignments. Yet, a real critical engagement is missing, and along with it, any further learning about navigating race in America as a young white person, let alone as a young person

of color. Instead, Cara learns to doubt herself. She learns to be passive, her self-confidence in her

convictions diminishes, and instead, asks herself if what she noticing actually is racism.

Later, Cara and I discuss the phenomenon of white kids calling other white kids "racists."

I tell Cara that in other schools, I hear that some white kids call other white kids racist. I ask her

if this happens at her school and whether claims of "real" racism, like the rules being biased,

have any room for articulation by students in this racially diverse school. She tells me that yes, at

her school, white kids too "joke" around by calling each other "racists" though it appears that

something slightly different is going on in Evergreen in terms of the use of this phrase:

> Usually when someone calls the other person racist, they really, they don't mean it seriously at
> all. They try to make it as a joke. And sometimes people think it's funny and sometimes people
> don't think it's funny at all. Like if it's for real, then it's not funny. But like for example, so like,
> maybe with the whole, we have pinneys for teams: white pinneys and black pinneys. And you
> will be like, "Oh I want to be on the black team" and then some white kids will say, "Oh that's
> racist" and they are like "ha ha" I think when people call each other racist, it's kinda like, they
> kinda want to point that out, but then they also want to be making a joke.

Unlike in Sheridan where calling someone "racist" was like calling someone "gay", here, it

seems that the use of "racist" is a manifestation of general unease around race accompanied by a

desire to be able to talk about what is right in front of them.

> **Maggie:** So why are they trying to point it out? Do they think racism is a joke?
>
> **Cara:** I think that, I think that people have this thing where they know people can be racist and
> they're not quite sure how to point that out seriously so they point that out through a joke. I think,
> now that I think about that now. (thinking to herself for a moment) Yeah, like, it's like the same
> with health class. You know the stuff is happening, like in sex ed or whatever, and people can't
> talk about sex or race or any of that stuff seriously, so they kinda have to say it through a joke. I
> think…they're not quite sure how to say it, so they say it through a joke … I think it's also like, I
> don't know, people want to talk about it but they're not quite sure how people are going to judge
> them so it just like in school in general, it's hard to talk about stuff like that without being judged
> or having people think something about them so I'm not sure how they would be able to make it
> so people could—and another thing, it's easier when you are just talking one-on-one, like that's
> how most kids talk about race, but it would be good if everyone could talk to everyone, but I
> think it would be difficult. So I think maybe like in 5th grade, we have Health but they don't really
> talk about race. They talk a lot about bullying and stuff like that. So I think it would be a good
> thing to just have someone who addresses race *straight on*. Like, not trying to make it sound, like
> in health class, not trying to make it sound anything other than straight on, like my parents do.
> Sometimes I feel like teachers aren't actually trying to figure out how to help anything exactly.

In Evergreen, the use of this term appears to be much more closely tied to the discomfort felt by students who want to talk about what they see in front of them being in a diverse space, but do not know how to or feel comfortable doing so. Cara is thoughtful and reflective about why her peers behave the way they do, concluding that the problem really is that no one will have a "straight on" discussion about race, especially not the adults in her school. She thinks teachers don't want to talk about race and she tells me that they "just don't care" and would rather ignore racial problems (like one child tells the teacher that another child said something racist and the teacher changes the subject) than have to deal with major conflict and outcomes of confronting the situation. Based on Charlotte's comments as well as many of those of her peers, it seems that overall in Evergreen, schools are abdicating their responsibility to help children make sense of their lives, teachers ignoring racism in the classroom as well as reproducing it themselves and inaccurately thinking that the students—including white students—do not notice.

Interestingly, Cara also tells me that because I am a stranger to her, she is more willing to speak honestly and openly with me, suggesting that this type of education might work better in her school as to reduce fear amongst students of being judged:

> **Cara:** So it's like, the person who is interviewing you, you aren't going to see a lot more in the future, so you probably will say more about what you are thinking.
>
> **Maggie:** That's such an interesting point.
>
> **Cara:** Yeah because if they know you, they aren't going to be quite as honest because they know they will see you again and they don't want to be judged. That's how I feel. I can just say whatever to you because it's not like I will see you again. (giggling in a good natured way)

Here, Cara is more concrete about the fears that white children have, and even seems to include herself in this analysis: no white kid wants to be judged or viewed negatively. Thus, they avoid the topic altogether, which, in their minds, releases them from any kind of responsibility or potential judgment or critique by others. However, Cara does not describe herself nor her peers

as not noticing race or not having thoughts, questions, and opinions about it. Rather, she

demonstrates that she actually holds quite strong views about race relations, has questions she

wishes she could discuss with informed adults that are not just her parents, and is actively trying

to make sense of her unearned privileges, both the positives and the negatives that come with

these privileges. Yet, Cara feels there are very few spaces for her and people like her to express

themselves, ask the questions they have, and to gain accurate information about race. Even in a

diverse place like her middle school, these conversations are avoided when she believes they

ought to be addressed head on—or at least avoided by her white teachers. She tells me that her

parents, unlike her teachers, do talk openly about race, and that she talks with her friends about

this topic as well. I ask her what kinds of conversations she has with her parents, and she

immediately tells me about how they talk at great length about class privilege, perhaps over

everything else:

> **Cara:** Like we go out to dinner a fair amount and they want to make sure that I know that this is a privilege and like they tell me like, "You know when you get into college or whatever, maybe you can't go out to dinner as much" And we get organic food and maybe I won't be able to afford that when I am in college. So they make sure to show me that's a privilege and you're not always. Like, you might grow up and not have as much money as we do, they will tell me, so you have to recognize that this is a privilege and you should enjoy it but it's not like it is going to necessarily happen for ever.
>
> **Maggie:** And what about privilege with respect to race? Do you think that being white is a privilege?
>
> **Cara:** I think that, I think it might have to do with the whole segregation thing and as it comes up, like the schools and jobs people have. So, I think that your privileges kind of branch off of that. If you live in a segregated place with no jobs or bad schools, it is not easy. But I do think, another thing that might seem kind of racist if you just say whites have more privileges. Cuz even if that is true, you just don't want to seem like you're saying it's better to be white or something like that. It's not better to be white, but it's easier, which isn't fair. I think that's a good way of putting it.

Here, Cara distinguishes between a positive aspect of privilege – being able to do nice things like

go out to dinner and eat organic food – versus a negative aspect of privilege – thinking you are

better than other people because you have access to more and your life is "easier" in a way that

isn't fair for others. Cara demonstrates that she has thought about privilege a lot in the past and has a complex understanding of both how lucky she is as well as how unfair her own privilege is for other people. A lot of this has to do with the kinds of conversations her parents initiate and the types of experiences they provide her. Later, we discuss the police and she again draws on the notion of privilege in her explanation of how police make choices about which neighborhoods to spend time surveying the behavior of kids:

> Yeah, I think another thing that happens is that when the police think a neighborhood is bad, they stay there, like a black neighborhood. Or, when also when things get reported. Like, for example, once there were a lot of cars speeding here and there are lots of kids so a person called and had the police give out speeding tickets so that the kids would be more safe. But, in other neighborhoods, the police are always there. And maybe it's because there are more fights and gangs and also white trash, which is that they are white and live in those neighborhoods, but I think neighborhoods are usually more divided by race so I dunno. But anyway, if the police always go to the second neighborhood, it is almost like they are like looking for trouble rather than hearing about it and then going (like in the speeding tickets example.) So that's why so many black kids get in trouble compared to white kids.

Cara speaks passionately and confidently as she discusses her theory on race and policing, a topic that her father tells me they have discussed in the past. Cara draws on ideas of residential segregation in her analysis, as well as how race and class are interconnected in particular ways. Unlike many of her peers in Sheridan, she attributes the disproportionately of black children getting in trouble with the police, and at school, to the behavior of police officers and teachers rather than the kids themselves.

Finally, Cara and I discuss her experience at the Presidential Inauguration, as I am interested on her take on it given what her parents have told me:

> **Cara:** Yeah, the thing is, when I was that age, I don't think I thought about the African American thing. I think it was just my parents saying, "Oh! This is the guy we want!" And me and my friend Harper, who lives over there, in our snow pants in the winter and saying "Vote for Obama!" and yelling it on the street. So I don't think I was thinking he was black more than just—because that was my first age when I really knew about elections. Before Barack Obama, I never knew, like George Bush, I never really understood politics that well, so that was the first time I actually understood—and I think because everyone was making a big deal about it, I was paying more attention, but I wasn't really sure why it was a big deal so that was the first time I was like paying attention to politics, what year was that 2009? 2008?

Maggie: 2008

Cara: So I was like 9? So that is like when you first start paying attention to it.

Maggie: So do you remember—like your mom said you guys went to the Inauguration?

Cara: Yeah.

Maggie: Do you remember that really well?

Cara: I just remember it was REALLY COLD. And it took us a minute to get in, but we were actually pretty close, which was cool. But I remember being really cold and but like I said, I don't really think I thought about the race thing. Like, I think when you are that age, your parents, like my parents aren't racist, so if you don't hear your parents saying anything bad about black people, you don't really think about it. Like, when you're that age, unless your parents have actually raised you that way, you don't even think about the diversity between whites and blacks because you are just used to everyone being people. It seems like as you grow older, you learn more about what other people are talking about and my parents at least talk to me about it more, but when you are younger, you are only around a certain zone of people and what they think. But then you learn what other people think. And then you understand better. That's what is happening to me. I am learning more as I get older….I think what I remember more is the first woman president running. Like Hillary Clinton, how she was running. Because I don't think I thought about race that much. I remember I just thought it was cool because there was like the first something, and that was the first black man, Barack Obama and the first woman, Hillary Clinton, and that was what was exciting.

Here, Cara makes an important point about developmental understandings of race and difference. Even only a few years later, Cara can think of how her perceptions of race have shifted as she has grown older. Not noticing race when she was nine, even in a racially diverse scenario and in a milestone and celebratory moment of American history, and especially black history in America, is mostly due to her age, she believes. I continue to ask her a few more questions about Obama's election:

Maggie: So do you think that because he got elected that that means the United States no longer has racism?

Cara: I don't think it does. I think it just shows we are moving forward. I think it's more showing a step, but I don't think it's over. I think it shows we are trying to get past it. There's a small step of something that is happening.

Maggie: Where do you think you can still find racism?

Cara: I don't know if this is true, but I know from history we always hear about the South. So it might still be there more? It might also have to do with those rich neighborhoods. It's also just here in [this state], but not really in my immediate life.

Charlotte's comments in this moment of our interview illustrate that while she does not feel that racism is in her "immediate life," racism still exists in America, even with the election of the first black president. Interestingly, she seems to not bring up examples that she previously mentioned about teachers and differential discipline practices or the policing practices she discussed earlier. Perhaps this is because she feels that she already shared these ideas with me, or perhaps she is hesitant to label these patterns as "racist." In any case, she again speaks to how race and class work together in Petersfield when she references "those rich neighborhoods" as cites of potential racism, and unlike her peers in Sheridan, both in this moment and across my time spent with her, she clearly believes that race still matters in American society.

Conclusions

Janet and Tom create a context of childhood for their daughter that is filled to the brim with travel experiences, modeling of social activism, opportunities to partake in this action, open discussions about class and race inequality in America, and exposure to and modeling of interracial friendships. The Lacey's have chosen to live in Evergreen and send Cara to Evergreen public schools primarily so that she can be in a racially and socioeconomically diverse environment, which she is. These choices about designing a particular kind of racial context for Cara were made with very concrete parenting priorities and goals in mind—priorities informed by Janet and Tom's own experiences with racial socialization in childhood and adulthood. Janet and Tom want their daughter to grow up in an environment in which she hopefully learns to recognize privilege and work against an unjust system that gave her that privilege in the first place.

Charlotte's experiences and interactions within this racial context have led her to produce knowledge about race that is different than that of her Sheridan peers. Cara can talk much more fluently about race, white fear, patterns of inequality, American history of segregation and discrimination, and the complexities of privilege. She attends a racially diverse school where race comes up as a topic of conversation between students, and the potential for inter-group friendships exists. Her school has a social studies curriculum that includes a multicultural perspective on American history. She lives in a place that is somewhat racially diverse, her parents take her on trips that expose her to different cultures and ways of life, Janet encourages her to watch social documentaries, and Tom talks with her about politics and inequality almost everyday.

Yet, despite her parent's efforts to provide Cara with the tools necessary to actively challenge racism, Cara also causes her parents to worry about whether or not she "gets it": Why didn't she mention race in her newspaper article about attending the Inauguration? Why doesn't she have as many friends of color as she used to? What does she really think about the black boys in school who get in trouble a lot with the teacher? Is even this neighborhood of Evergreen not diverse enough, particularly along race *and* class lines? Should they interpret her laughing with a group of black girls at a chorus concert as evidence that she does in fact have equal status inter-group relationships at school? And, because the Laceys are so concerned about what she is learning and doing and thinking, they constantly intervene into Charlotte's life in subtle and overt ways, urging her to think the way they think about these matters.

What is also clear from talking with Cara is that the messages her parents work so hard to convey to her at home and the tools with which they provide her are not supported at school. This is ironic because the Laceys have elected to send her to this particular school because of

their goal for her to have access to intergroup contact. Given the lack of critical engagement with issues related to race at school—both in terms of curriculum as well as interpersonal interactions in the classroom, it seems that the racial socialization that happens at home is at odds with what Cara is learning about race at school. While the school does address, for instance, a multicultural perspective on American history, the critical lens and analysis seems to fall short, particularly when it comes to helping students work through the emotions they experience in connection to what they learn. From the perspective of children who attend this school, it seems that the school lacks adult leadership in the area of talking about human difference "straight on." Students notice their teachers engaging in racial patterns in discipline, for instance, or avoiding discussions about race when conflict arises between students. The impact of these problems at school on Cara can be seen when Cara questions whether or not what she observes at school is, in fact, racism.

Charlotte's racial context of childhood provides her with a set of tools that she takes up and deploys in various ways. While Cara certainly does not have all the answers about race in America, openly admits her own white fears about being judged a racist, and at times contradicts herself while talking about these topics and how they interrelate, she addresses my questions "straight on" and understands racism is an ongoing social problem in America that she, as a person in a position of privilege, has a responsibility to think carefully about and take action against.

CHAPTER 7: The Norton-Smith Family—"Beating it into them"

The Norton-Smiths live in a large, five bedroom purple Victorian house with white trim. Most of the traffic on their street is that of bikes and pedestrians, many people casually stopping at the public park adjacent to the Norton-Smith's home to sit on a bench or hang from the monkey bars on the play structure. The purple house is surrounded by a variety of wild flowers, slightly overgrown grass, and a few protest signs on wooden stakes, hammered into the lawn; a compost pile, grill, and picnic table are in the backyard along with the family's bicycles and swimsuits drying on a clothes line. The Norton-Smiths live within walking distance of the cooperative grocery store as well as the lake and a popular bike and running path.

While the home is older, it is in excellent condition and newly remodeled inside. The living room has numerous stacks of neatly piled books, arranged decoratively as in a Crate and Barrel magazine, though the books appear not to be just for decoration, as some of them lay open on the top of the stack. These books include works by Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander as well as a variety of law and policy books focused on race and the law. A few paintings hang on the walls of the living room along with a framed black and white photograph from a 1960s protest. The furniture is minimal and somewhat formal, and the space is tidy with only a few of the children's toys and school materials noticeable.

Jennifer and Greg Norton-Smith both work as lawyers. The two parents both work long hours, and their two children, eleven-year-old Conor and eight-year-old Anna, have an after school babysitter that comes to care for them, as well as math tutors, piano teachers, and local neighbors and friends who also help out. The Norton-Smiths have time reserved for just

themselves on the weekends, as Jennifer and Greg prioritize spending family time together and have to schedule it in order for it to happen.

Despite their intense careers and family responsibilities, Jennifer and Greg appear to work well together. In particular, the two parents seem to share household labor. For instance, when I first met the family, Jennifer was still at work and Greg had prepared dinner, managed Anna's math tutoring appointment, and had also agreed to be interviewed by me. He also assisted with procedural matters related to Conor's interview, such as signing the consent forms and helping me build rapport with his somewhat reserved son, offering privacy but also checking in on our interview from time to time, which helped make Conor more comfortable. I could also hear the washing machine running in the background as Greg was tidying up the house. In many of the other homes I studied, the mother almost always introduced me to the children, responded to my emails, and coordinated the interview and observation process. I also observed the mothers in other homes, even with their professional careers, doing most of the cooking, cleaning and child rearing tasks in the home. When Jennifer finally walked in the front door amidst a flurry of legal folders and papers, her high heels clicking loudly on the hardwood floor, the children jumped up and ran over to greet her, Greg remaining in the kitchen finishing up the dinner dishes, Amy Goodman's voice from *Democracy Now* playing on the kitchen radio.

Eleven-year-old Conor is a reserved, thoughtful boy with light brown hair and eyes. Conor has a close relationship with his parents, evidenced by the hugs and excitement when Jennifer comes home as well as the questions he asks his father and his overall level of engagement with the things his dad says. Conor is interested in his father's opinions and ideas, though he also occasionally challenges Greg, especially if Greg does not get something precisely factual, such as the details of a story. He likes to sit back and observe what goes on around him,

paying attention to the small details of social interactions between people. While he appears shy to strangers, he most certainly is not shy in the minds of those who know him well, especially when it comes to articulating his opinion on various matters. He is soft-spoken but very passionate in his personal views. In talking with Conor, for example, it becomes clear to me that he is a leader, but one that leads by example rather than by bullhorn. For instance, this excerpt from my field notes describes Conor's role in a group project assigned by his teacher:

> Conor excitedly tells me that his group has "won!" Conor's language arts teacher had previously divided his classmates into six different groups and assigned each group an animal. Each group was responsible for putting together a research-based argument that convinced the rest of the class that their animal was "the most important animal to be saved from extinction" and why this animal ought to be the most highly protected from extinction or endangerment. Conor, strategizing from the moment the teacher assigned the topic, and talking about his strategy at length, decided that his group needed to focus attention not only on why their animal, the elephant, is in need of protection, but why the other animals assigned to other groups are in less need of protection. Somehow, he convinces his fellow group members to research not only the elephant, but all of the other animals assigned to other groups as well. He tells me that his peers were not entirely excited about doing more work, but he was able to convince them that "it was worth it." He tells me they won the debate and were given a prize by the teacher for their ingenuity.

Conor excels in school and socially: he is a straight-A student and has a big group of friends. His friendship group includes predominantly white children but a few black boys as well. He "loves to debate stuff" and enjoys reading the newspaper. He also plays soccer and video games and runs around in the neighborhood with the other children. His younger sister Anna is not as reserved, as I overhear her working with her math tutor a few times, urging the conversation away from long division to stories about her vacation. Anna loves gymnastics and yoga as well as playing the piano and being outdoors. The children have an extended family with whom they are close. Each summer, they spend a week with their grandparents, which has just happened when I first meet the family, and they talk often about their summer fun with their relatives. Jennifer and Greg stayed home from the vacation for work purposes this year.

Greg and Jennifer: Backgrounds and Parenting Priorities

"He's a hillbilly," Conor interjects into my conversation with Greg about where Greg grew up. Greg laughs and responds, "Yeah, I grew up in Iowa on a farm. And then I went to college in Providence, Rhode Island and then I went into the Peace Corps in West Africa and then I went to law school." Conor again interrupts his father, "And then you met my mom." Greg answers with a smile. "Yes, and then I met a very important person in my life in the Peace Corps." Greg goes on to tell me that he met Jennifer while they both were in Ghana working for the Peace Corps. They then attended law school in Boston together. Later, Greg tells me that growing up, his family, living in rural white Iowa, never really talked about topics like race – it was a "non-talking background," as he puts it – and that if he hadn't met Jennifer, he may have just "lived his life without talking about stuff." He describes his wife, telling me that Jennifer "is very proactive about every kind of learning situation and race is extremely important to her and us but she is really, you know, any opportunity that presents itself, you should talk about it and she talks about what she believes." Greg also tells me that despite not talking about topics such as race, his family of origin "really believes in helping people" and "trying to do things to make life better for other people." He reflects on this for a moment and then decidedly states, "I think that desire [to help people] probably came from my family and then an actual *way* to do that came from my own life experiences."

Today, Greg works as an immigration attorney, helping individuals acquire work visas as well as doing pro bono work and advising undocumented immigrants.

> I work to get people authorization to live or work in the United States…there is a racial aspect to it, but most of the people I work with have Bachelor degrees or more so it's the higher end of the spectrum in terms of education so that means, unfortunately for true diversity sake, it's a lot of highly educated Europeans and South Asians. India, Pakistan and then tons of people from Eastern Asia from Vietnam and China and Korea.

I probe Greg about this question of "true diversity" and he tells me that he wishes he could do more asylum work. "Occasionally, I get to do some asylum work because I worked in West

Africa, and lived there so I speak some of the languages there and so I can help people a little bit

more and there is an amazing number of families from West Africa in [this state.]" He also tells

me, "I'm not really like a do-gooder, white horse guy." He says he wishes he could do more to

help undocumented workers, for instance, rather than just highly educated corporate employees,

but that ultimately, because of public policy, there is not much he can do, even if he wanted to:

> We started [an organization for undocumented people] in Petersfield to help people. I mean, the
> best thing we can do is tell them, 'there is nothing that can be done for you' because there are a
> lot of people who take advantage of them and take money form them or file papers that will end
> up getting them deported when they otherwise wouldn't be so the best service we can do is to just
> tell people the truth.

In addition to his work at a corporate law firm and his pro bono work, he also teaches classes at a

nearby college. The day I speak to him about his work there, he has just come to a horrifying

realization:

> I realized today, I'm a scab! Can you believe that? I realized today that I am undercutting the
> labor market for the real professors! They use a lot of us and it's just out of cheapness! They like
> to say, 'it's law in action' which means people are out in the world doing it, so we want them to
> come and teach about it. FOR CHEAP! Yeah. So I'm going to have a little talk with them.

Greg is very interested in supporting labor unions and advocating for worker's rights. But, his

real passion lies in immigration policy and teaching. He has many opinions about immigration

policy and politics, opinions he openly shares with his son, and he believes that in order to truly

discuss immigration law, one must examine the history of this issue, such as the treatment of the

Chinese and labor needs over time, as well as employ Critical Race Theory to do so. "I like my

students to know from the very beginning that race is part of all of this discussion." He goes on

to describe studies in South Africa, debates around the Census, and the relationship between the

United States and Mexico. "I think race is a huge factor in all of this," he tells me, "And I make

sure my law students know that." Conor sits quietly nearby listening to our entire conversation

carefully, occasionally asking clarifying questions of his dad such as, "How come I didn't get to

fill out a Census form?" and "What does that mean?" Greg answers Conor's questions patiently

and in terms Conor can understand, including his son in our otherwise rather academic

conversation.

In addition to feeling like he has some room to help people, even in limited ways, Greg

loves his work because he gets "to learn a million stories about people from all over the place."

He goes on to describe the range of people with whom he works, illustrating how he values

interacting with people from extremely varied backgrounds:

> It is so fascinating and so fulfilling because no matter what they're doing…everyone's story is
> different. From the super well-off CEOs who are starting companies in America all the way down
> to companies who say, 'the government is coming in and they are going to audit us so we've
> gotta audit you and you can't work here but we really want to do something for you. What can we
> do? What can't we do?' and then all the people in the middle who are just trying to get jobs or
> who think their lives will be better if they move here. And then people who move back to their
> country because they've had it with this place. It's just fabulous. But you know, I have to also
> mention how hard it is, so I get credit too. (laughing) There is a lot of it. There is so much going
> on right now. The ramifications are ridiculous so it would be nice to not have people's lives in
> your hands except it is kind of fulfilling that way in making a difference.

Overall, while he seems conflicted as to how much he is truly helping people, Greg believes he is

making a difference for some individuals, which is what seems to make him feel fulfilled with

his career. Based on my observations of Conor during his father's interview with me, it is clear

that Conor has a very good sense of what his father does for work, and his father overtly states

his commitment to helping people, thinking critically about race, and devoting one's life to social

and legal justice in front of his son and even to his son directly. For instance, at one point, Greg

pauses and turns to Conor, playfully rustling his son's hair with his hand while saying, "Conor, I

hope you can find a job where you feel like you are making the world a better place for

everyone. That is really important, kiddo." Conor responds, "I know, Dad. I just don't want to be

a lawyer because you work too much and are too stressed out." Greg agrees with him and returns

to the interview.

Overall, Conor is included in our conversation through both his own assertive behavior but also through the way his father allows and even invites him to participate. Conor sits and processes what we are discussing, asking questions as he interprets what his dad is saying. For example, he asks his father to clarify jargon that Conor does not understand and follows our conversation, looking back and forth between me and Greg as we speak to one another. He appears fully engaged in our "adult" conversation. For comparison sake, most other families in all of the communities in my study, encouraged their child to "go play" or "go do your homework" rather than participate in the "adult" interview. Thus, it is important to note that Greg does not hold anything back from his son and speaks in open and frank terms in his son's presence.

"Talk and talk until they get it!"

Greg and Jennifer approach the racial socialization of their children in deliberate, active, explicit and regular ways. In particular, this approach to socialization is intended to teach their children that "you gotta walk the talk!" Greg and Jennifer seek to teach their children that one must put their ideals into action, and they provide their children with real living examples of such action through their own careers. These parents devote their lives to their ideals, working long, hard hours to try to "make life better for other people." They both explain to me that they are very privileged and that with that privilege comes responsibility, which is why they dedicate so much of their time and energy to their careers in law, and why they spend so much time thinking and talking about social issues with their children. Greg and Jennifer actively work to teach their children previously agreed-upon, explicit messages about issues related to social inequality and particularly racial inequality and racial privilege. Unlike most other families, Jennifer and Greg tell me that as parents, they have conversations about how to go about talking

to their children and that much of their parenting with respect to teaching lessons about social inequality is premeditated and planned ahead of time. I ask them what lessons are most important for their children to acquire. They tell me, separately, very similar things:

> **Greg:** The most important thing, you know, the most important thing that I hope my kids grow up with is what their place in the world is and what other people's place in the world is and you know, how connected we are to all those other people and that you can't really you know, be content until other people have the same opportunities you have and you gotta, you know, you gotta be somebody in that space. You can't just let those things happen. You gotta walk the talk. And that would be great if they found their way in life to make sure that you know, everybody got the same sort of opportunities…

> **Jennifer:** People are here [in Evergreen] because they want to be in a more open situation where there is an awareness that exposure to people who are not well-off and who come from very different racial backgrounds and who may make you uncomfortable is really important. I like to think that my son is in some kind of position to better negotiate that discomfort…I think that is a really useful sort of skill… I'm not really focused on someone being top of their class, or getting into the best college, or making the most money, or being the most famous, which I feel there is more of that [in Sheridan] and it makes me happy to be here … It is more important that my child knows how to interact with all kinds of people around him and be aware of his own position in the world.

Greg and Jennifer both indicate to me that they want their kids to grow up recognizing their unearned privileges and social position, acting upon that recognition such that they can work to make sure all people have good lives, rich with opportunity and justice. As Jennifer puts it:

> Recognizing people's differences and recognizing people's strengths and weaknesses and backgrounds is important. I mean, just being an empathetic human being as you go through the world, and in order to do that, you have to appreciate what their experiences might be vis-à-vis yours and so Conor is like a white male from a privileged household and he needs to be very cognizant of that…I want him to be informed and nondiscriminatory and empathetic.

Jennifer wants her son to recognize that not only is he privileged in terms of race and class but also with respect to gender. In order to do that, she explains, it is all about "presenting [children] with opportunities to think about and talk about their position in the world." Jennifer goes on to describe how challenging this can be:

> Petersfield is very liberal and people think hard about their lives and choices in general. And then in the neighborhood we live in, it's part of the reason we live there. It's because I think we are consistent with the people in our community in how we approach issues of race and inequality, but what is disturbing to me is that there are very few people of color or minorities in positions of power so what's disturbing to me is that my kids, their teachers are white, their coaches are white,

> their ballet teachers are white, you know, EVERYBODY is white…so one of the things we thought about when we moved here was how to develop relationships with people of color, how to find arenas where we were going to be able to interact with diverse people because just as a general concept when you raise kids, you are often guided by what they are ready to talk about and you can't really just give them more than they can digest but if you present them with opportunities to think about things then you can talk about them. So I think it's really important to present opportunities"

Jennifer describes the family's involvement in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program. Marcus, a black boy the same age as Conor spends one day a week with the Norton-Smith family, which presents both challenges and opportunities for everyone to talk about their feelings and perspectives, according to Jennifer, especially as the kids get older and are increasingly aware of how differently they each get treated as a result of their race, even just walking down the street in Petersfield. Jennifer describes how she just "talks and talks" about inequality with Conor and Anna "until they get it," often including Marcus in these conversations. Unlike Conor, Anna is harder to read, Jennifer tells me. Conor, on the other hand, is "super curious" and "precocious." "He really just wants to talk about things so when you have an open dialog, it's easier to sorta get at what their preconceived notions might be or whatever…while with Anna, I don't know what kinds of things are being formulated in her mind." Jennifer talks to her children, but she also listens to what they say and don't say. It is important to Jennifer that she is able to know what her kids think, even if these ideas include "preconceived notions" that may not reflect reality or the empathy she encourages in her children. Jennifer is aware that her children may not form the ideas that she hopes they form, but through listening to them, she hopes to identify their ideas and then work to deconstruct or dismantle the ones she feels are inaccurate or inappropriate. Jennifer is so interested in how Conor makes sense of the world in terms of race that she even contacts me, a few weeks after I interview Conor, asking if she can have a copy of the interview recording—just so she knows what they need to "work on" and also just out of genuine curiosity. I did not give her a copy of the tape, citing ethical concerns. She was understanding of this.

While no other parent asked for a copy of the tape, Evergreen parents overall were more curious

as to how their children answered my questions than parents in Sheridan, or Wheaton Hills, the

third context. And, in large part, this curiosity seemed to be driven by parents wanting to figure

out where they needed to intervene into their children's lives to ensure their kid held racial

knowledge of which they approved of as parents. Evergreen parents reject the oftentimes passive

socialization approach found in Sheridan parents—putting children in all white spaces and

seeking to avoid race, albeit with exceptions to the rule like Meredith Chablis—and instead take

on an active and regular approach to socialization in which daily conversations, choices, and

interactions continuously provide children with ideas about race and inequality.

Another aspect of talking about race with Conor and Anna is answering the questions that

they pose. Jennifer gave me a list of examples of moments in which her children asked her direct

questions about race, many of them connected to sports. For instance, "Why are college football

teams predominantly black?" or "Why are basketball teams predominantly black?" or "Do black

people have a fast twitch muscle that allows them to run faster?" or "Why do Ethiopians always

win the Boston Marathon?" or "Why are so many homeless people in downtown Petersfield

black or brown?" Jennifer confides to me that those are really "hard conversations," especially

the ones about sports and race, as she does not want to promote biological understandings of

race:

> I mean, we've embraced them and we try to explore things with them but it's not an easy thing to
> talk about with an 8 year old about. But they are asking because they notice. So you can't just
> ignore it. You HAVE to address it…we're not as subtle as we used to be. We used to be more
> subtle. But I mean, Conor is aware when certain arenas are dominated by certain people. They
> notice this stuff! So we aren't as subtle now.

Jennifer believes strongly in the importance of having "hard conversations" with her children,

especially as they get older. While she used more "subtle" strategies when the children were

younger, such as offering experiences for her kids to interact with children of different races, she now tells me that given the kinds of questions the children ask along with their age, she is overt and direct in her approach. She feels more comfortable being the person providing them with answers than a peer or another parent or teacher or a television show, although her kids have extremely limited access to media outlets. The Norton-Smith's as parents limit and monitor their children's Internet activities, phone activities, and television watching. While many parents monitor these behaviors, the Norton-Smith's are particularly vigilant in this regard. Jennifer does not shy away from the reality that children are observant about the world around them, inclusive of the social world. Jennifer tells me passionately that she is convinced that all kids notice racial differences and disparities at very young ages and silencing the questions that they have for the sake of appearing "colorblind" does little to help children make sense of social inequality and encourages instead fear and avoidance of the topic of race. Jennifer does not want her children to avoid talking and listening to others about the topic of social inequality, particularly that of race inequality. Thus, it is a priority in her parenting to ensure that not only do her children have contextual experiences that encourage them to ask questions and notice human differences, but that she is prepared to answer their questions and have real conversations about social position, privilege, and inequality. Jennifer tells me that she reads as much as she can on the topic of race, in addition to immersing herself in interracial friendships and cross-cultural activities. For instance, she shares a number of conversations with me that she has had with black women about raising children, the politics of interracial adoption, and what happens in the principal's office when a white child calls a black child a racial epithet ("the entire situation became about the white woman's guilt and shame that her child behaved this way rather than about my friend or her kid"). She also tells me that the takes the children to all different kinds of cultural festivals

and events both in Petersfield as well as in other cities such as Chicago. She tells me about the

Hmong New Year they recently attended as well as the annual Juneteenth celebration in town

and the pride parade. She also brings the children to all different kinds of rallies and protests

including, during my period of data collection, a vigil for Troy Davis, an anti-military drone

protest, a Planned Parenthood rally, union rights protests, election campaign fundraising events,

and a DREAM Act and immigrant rights rally.

Unlike Greg, Jennifer grew up in the Deep South, attending a racially integrated public

school in a racially controversial time period for her community. She attributes much of her

interest in race relations in America to this childhood experience:

> I went to a high school that was in the middle of the city and for whatever reason because of geographic reasons, it married the poorest part of the city and the wealthiest part of the city and the poorest part of the city were all Black kids and there was very little dialog about race and we had a couple race riots and the corollary—I would go in my physics class and there were no, you know, everyone was white, because you know, there was really only white and black. There weren't any other races at that time. … It was like 70% Black um and I just remember having dialogs with teachers, kids who made C's who were Black, that was totally fine. But if I were making a C, my mother was called in. There was just this massive differential treatment. Um, so anyway, I think part of the reason I was frustrated about race and have cared a lot about race in particular and more than other inequalities, and particularly with respect to African Americans, is because of my experiences growing up in the South.

Jennifer describes in great detail the problems with her high school, especially in terms of

differential treatment of children on the basis of race. Subsequently, while Jennifer's immediate

neighborhood was quite white, her experiences at school offered lessons about racial injustice

that "frustrated" her and "sparked an interest in civil rights." Her childhood experiences also

inform how she approaches the topic of race with her children today, as a mother herself:

> There is something about coming from the South and recognizing that for a good portion of my life, I was not aware of my privilege, which has made it all the more important for me that that NOT be the case for my own children. Like, my mom is the perfect example. She's liberal but she never talked to us about race and she never had non-white people over and she would say, "Well, we're not racist" but then there were racist terms that her friends used and it was like, not until I was in college and I repeated a phrase to somebody and my friend YELLED at me…it was the first time someone had really gotten angry at me, you know, so I think it's maybe partly that, like this lost opportunity.

While Jennifer thinks back on her childhood as not being filled with discussions about race, to Greg, interviewed separately than Jennifer, his wife's childhood is "fascinating" and he attributes many of his wife's present-day interests and qualities to her early experiences. He says, "Her dad is a civil rights lawyer and closes down prisons when they aren't doing a good job for a long time and her mom is a family lawyer dealing mostly with domestic violence and poverty…"

While Greg attributes his wife's racial attitudes and approach to parenting to her own parents, that he views as very different from his own, Jennifer does not. She believes that really it was the difference between living in the South and the North that shaped her views. She explains to me the experiences she had in law school that really drew out these distinctions:

> I went to a very liberal law school in [New England]. And I was a Southern white girl and I mean, at [the law school], everybody is trying to out-liberal each other… I will never forget the time that I tried to explain that there are people in the South that do not assign racist terminology to the Confederate flag. I think we should get rid of the Confederate flag, but I also think people [in the South] should be educated. I think the South is a place where white people don't talk about it, there's this level of ignorance, at the very least, of the effect it has on black people. I never had it, my parents never had it, but I didn't really understand why because no one ever talked about it. So we had this moot court question around whether the Confederate flag constituted fighting words, and fighting words is an exception to the First Amendment and you know, they were like, "Of course it's fighting words, it's like putting a burning cross in your front yard" and I was like, "Oh my god, it's so not fighting words! It's the flag of Georgia for crying out loud, like really?" And I mean, yes, the Confederate flag is a huge problem. But I remember thinking at the time, if you can't talk to me, like here I am, recognizing how troubled my upbringing was and how troubled I am for not being informed, but I am so desperately wanting to understand and be a part of the solution and if you can't let me be a part of it, like really people?! (laughing) We might as well give up the ghost if we can't make a conversation happen. And so I had a profound feeling in law school about that. Like, I felt like you know we gotta figure out how to talk to each other and how to listen to each other, empathetically, but then there's the whole well, "Just because I'm black doesn't mean I have to educate you" and I totally get that and I don't really have a response to that. I mean, if you don't want to, you don't want to. Um, so maybe that's why I care a lot about [my son] being equipped enough to move through life and listen and talk and not stall the progress.

Jennifer also believes that racism is "insidious" and that "if left un-dealt with, will cause even more problems." She tells me that she thinks one of the best things she can offer to her kids is the language with which to have conversations about race with others, as this is something she

wishes she had in her early adult life and something she continues to work hard to learn. She tells

me that the specific skills she wants to help Conor develop include good listening skills,

language for having "hard conversations," and a sense of empathy so that he can form a critical

white racial consciousness. These are skills she began to develop while working for the NAACP

legal defense fund:

> My boss James worked down in the South during Brown v. Board and you know, really experienced vitriolic racism but he said, "I never felt physically unsafe the way I did at Harvard Law School. I would never go into Southie (Boston). No way would I go there!" And when Greg went there, the Black students were told what trains not to go on, you know, for their physical safety! I mean, that is just insane! So anyway, having those conversations when you're a white Southerner, it was just really, there was just so much there, you know? It really impacted me. And I realized so much working for James. Anyway, I just care a lot about it. I could talk about it for days, I'm afraid. But listening is so important, having language is so important and really, being able to be empathetic. I just think those are the things white people, many white people I know frankly, lack, and I want my children to have those attributes.

"An Intentional Community"

Moving to the Petersfield neighborhood of Evergreen was an intentional decision,

according to Greg and Jennifer, not only for them but for most of their neighbors. Greg describes

the neighborhood as well as how the family ended up here:

> I would say Evergreen is an intentional community I mean, we moved here on purpose…Initially, we rented a house in Wheaton Hills and we had friends here, lots of people from Boston live here, and we would visit them and think, '[Evergreen] is not exactly who we are, but it's who we want to be. The people who live here, live here because of what it is. They don't just sorta end up here and stay here. Cuz, you know, (laughing) a lot of people would NOT like living here. It's crazy, and sometimes, when a lot of different people live together, you have all sorts of reactions to things and there's some goofy stuff that goes down. But that's why the people who live here, live here….It's funny because it feels like we are the 'righteys' of the neighborhood because no one else wears a suit to work every day or works for a corporate law firm.

Greg describes how the Norton-Smiths made their way to Petersfield, and the neighborhood of

Evergreen specifically. "We literally picked a place off the map. It seemed like a good idea and

then we found jobs here and moved here," he tells me. Greg and Jennifer liked the idea of

Petersfield in part because they had family in the Midwest, but also because it seemed like "the right size city" and a place with "culture and politics" that they felt aligned with them:

> It was a progressive place that would be cozy enough to raise your family but yet the right kind of place. Not too close minded. We liked the idea of what the neighborhood was and the people who lived here… there are a lot of people here who live what they believe. It's totally impressive. They live it in the community, they live it in their own families, they live it individually… that's what this neighborhood means.

In addition to appreciating the political goals and activism of their neighbors, Jennifer also describes how 'fortunate' she feels that Evergreen is located in close proximity to the predominantly-black neighborhood faced with poverty as this leads to racially and economically integrated public schools – 'a rare occurrence in America,' she tells me while we cook dinner together one evening. Greg too comments during his interview that while there is "more diversity and sexual preference diversity," but that he "wishes the diversity was a bit better." I ask him what he means by this, as does Conor who interjects at the same time as me, "I thought there was diversity here!" Greg explains to us both that he worries about the way in which race and class are interrelated in Petersfield.

> I think, Conor, that sometimes the kids at school with behavioral issues, or the kids with the extra issues, are usually ones that come from a different background than you. I guess I am speaking a little bit in code here. What I mean is, [turning to me and away from his son] it worries me that Conor goes to a school where all the black and Latino kids are also the poor kids and kids with extra struggles. I wonder how that affects him. I think about if we lived in a bigger place where that wasn't always true, like Atlanta, Atlanta always comes to mind, maybe it would be better to live in a place that really has a middle class of people who are not majority culture. I guess I am talking in code again.

Much like other parents in Evergreen, Greg is concerned that because there are only a handful of affluent or middle class students of color at Conor's school, perhaps this will lead to Conor making associations between people of color and poverty. Greg is worried that Conor will form negative views of his black and Latino peers, poverty somehow influencing these racial ideas. Aware that he keeps reverting to coded language rather than saying "black" or "Latino", Greg

reluctantly suggests that perhaps Petersfield would be a "better" place to live and go to school if more of the families of color in town were more middle class, like he is.

Both Greg and Jennifer express to me that they take issue with the few number of black teachers, coaches, administrators, and politicians in the Evergreen schools and Petersfield more generally, because of what this pattern teaches kids like Conor. The Norton-Smiths are also concerned that practices at the school such as tracking or unfair discipline policies may send Conor messages about race that they are working hard to combat. For instance, Jennifer comments on Evergreen High School and her recent discovery she made about security guards and metal detectors:

> I found out there are security guards at Evergreen High School and metal detectors – I was horrified! It's completely insane. And it's amazing to me what people moralize. I said, when I found this out…I talked to a lot of people and they were like, "Sure! You know, it's a lot of different kids" and I said, "There are no security guards at the public library. There's no security guards or metal detectors at the grocery store!" I mean, I can think of a lot of places that have that many people in them without armed people walking around, right? It's just crazy to me! But what actually makes me nervous about Evergreen High is that I have heard it is broken down racially and economically, which is what I grew up with and it's awful. Having said all that, I think, what I know about the people like us who choose to send their kids to Evergreen, they are people who think a lot about it and wanting to fix it. There's a program there … that helps minority, lower-income kids get access to college so I do think there's opportunity there but I'm not going to lie: I worry about going in and our kids getting syphoned off into AP classes and being in all-white classrooms and no! I want them to be in diverse spaces. That's part of why we are sending them there!

While aware that these problems impact all kids at the school, Jennifer focuses on her own child's experiences at the school, subtly reminding me that she has a choice as to where she sends her kids to school. Because Jennifer wants her children to be in "diverse spaces" so that they can develop the kind of racial consciousness that she wants them to develop, she "chooses" this school and subsequently takes issue with the tracking that goes on in the school because this leads to the outcome that she is trying to avoid: she wants her kids to be around people of who are different than they are, particularly in terms of race. She talks about "the people who choose to send their kids to Evergreen" as "people who think a lot about it and wanting to fix it", "it"

presumably referring to the racial inequity at the school; ironically, this statement seems to be made in reference to the other affluent white families she knows who have "opted in" to the public schools in Evergreen.

Greg shares her concerns, passionately arguing for the importance of staying in public schools because of political ideals and the opportunity for diversity while at the same time recognizing that it is not enough to just attend an integrated school as many things go on inside the school that need to be examined critically, especially if one wants their child to truly have that diverse experience. Understandably, the experiences of their own child are at the forefront of their mind during my interview with them given the nature of our conversation. And while they do discuss how problems at school are bad for children of color, how does one tie together or balance concerns about their own white child's opportunity for experiences of diversity with the lack of opportunities at the school due to tracking, for instance, for children of color? While the Norton-Smiths do seem to suggest that these goals are related and ought to be considered together, school-based research finds that many white parents who are committed to integrated, urban public schools tend to 'rule the school,' pushing their own agendas while ignoring the voices of minority parents (Lewis 2003; Noguera 2008; Posey 2012). Further research demonstrates how private businesses and policy makers seek to retain middle-class families in urban schools, valuing them more highly than their working-class or poor peers (Cucciara 2013). While it does not seem that the Norton-Smith's are engaging in these practices, certainly, questions emerge in Evergreen about how to be a white member of a racially diverse parent population within a community in which structural inequality persists and defines much of people's everyday experiences.

On a similar note, Jennifer tells me how she "mourns" public education and how she mourns the fact that she has to "supplement" her own children's education through enrichment activities and extra education outside of school to make up for what her children are missing out on by not attending other schools in town:

> I think public access to a good education is just core to a democratic model and I think you know…more lobbyists for charter schools, they put in more money for charter school lobbyists in this state than in like all other lobbyists combined and that is because they have a SHIT-TON of money, I mean, they are privatizing education and I, that, you know, I mourn that. Because I mean, my kids are going to be fine. But it's the Marcuses of the world that aren't going to be fine. They already aren't fine. And we are in a safe enough place where we're not going to make a guinea pig out of our kids, but what about elsewhere? I mean, we can supplement our kids' education and we will. We are going to have to navigate some issues. And we're going to have to have a lot of conversations about race and inequality.

Here, the complexity of the conundrum of privilege is illuminated. Even when parents want to teach their kids to recognize and fight against injustice, how much commitment is enough, especially when this commitment implicates their own children's futures or includes elements perceived to be beyond their control? Do they supplement their child's education because the school s/he attends is inadequate, even if that means their kid is getting an advantage as a result? How does one advocate for one's own child as well as other people's children, all at the same time? What are the politics of advocating for other people's children, especially if this means limiting the voices of other parents?

In the specific case of the Norton-Smiths, on the one hand, Jennifer passionately and genuinely wants to support the principle of equal educational opportunity through public schooling, expressing anger at the fact that her children will "be fine" while kids like Marcus may not be. Yet, on the other hand, she does not want to make her child a "guinea pig" and therefore she makes trade-offs, such as providing her son with tutoring, a choice that she tells me she knows contradicts the notion of an equal education for all children. Part of the challenge for

parents like Jennifer and Greg, thus, is that they attempt to solve a structural problem on the individual level and feel regularly conflicted about their choices. And this challenge is tied to a broader dilemma: What does it mean to be white and liberal/progressive and well-resourced in a world rife with structural inequality?

This conundrum of privilege is not limited to schools. Greg also discusses his concerns about Evergreen itself, both in terms of the racial diversity but also what appears to be ongoing gentrification practices and increasing property values that he worries will drive out poorer families, renters, graduate students, etc., leaving the community as the white, affluent, homogenous place that people like he are trying to escape. Greg has faith that the current residents of Evergreen "won't let this happen," suggesting that people like himself can control what happens to the future of his neighborhood. However, he admits, "if people like us keep moving in, soon it is going to just be a place full of a bunch of people who look like us!" Again, the broader dilemma of being progressive and well-resourced in a world with structural inequality emerges here.

Greg discusses all of these thoughts and concerns in front of his son, evidence that Conor is exposed to these kinds of complex, sociological conversations. Greg does not hold back discussing any of these topics in front of his child. For instance, following our discussion of his concerns about Evergreen, he talks about what he perceives as the biggest problem white people have. "So many white people get defensive and stop listening about so many things and don't want to admit their own biases. I do plenty of things wrong, but I am a pretty confident person and so I feel that I am better equipped to handle criticism and being called out, which is what people in the majority all need. Also, Jennifer beats it into me." Greg continues, describing

himself as full of unintentional racial bias, something that he admits openly to me and in front of his son:

> I am a racist, for sure. If I can identify it, all the better because maybe I can deal with it. I mean, it happens all the time. We have innate issues of racist thinking, you know, in the law, the issue of cross-racial identification so if you have a line-up of people, you have a much harder time identifying someone of another race. So you know, if you're walking down the street and there are people different than me and it's late at night, I'm more likely to be tensed up about it. And you know, I believe, the less you are around people who are different, the more you will have that and act on it because you just haven't had the experience to say, ugh, that is so dumb.

Given these concerns about implicit racial bias, Greg works really hard to encourage critical thinking about race in his children, or as he puts it, attempts to "beat it into them." Greg tells me (and Conor) that he always thinks it is better to provide kids with more information than they perhaps even ask for or want because, "you know, you want to be there, on top of it, before something or someone else is….we over do a lot of things, going places, doing things that we think are important, and I'm sure they just get it through all the things that we do, but we tell them why it's important and we talk about it and you know like politics and whatever is happening, we just want them to be informed because it is so easy not to be."

Conor's Racial Common Sense

While his parents talk at length about the things they want to teach their son, how does Conor actually understand race, racism and privilege? One summer afternoon, Conor and I sit in his living room in front of the air conditioner, drinking lemonade. Conor has finally opened up to me after some hard work on my behalf to establish rapport. I ask him if he thinks racism is still a problem in the United States:

> **Conor:** I think [racism] is a WAY bigger problem than people realize. It's nowhere near what it used to be… it's just different and white people don't realize it… I think it's still there. It's just not as present and people want to hide it. Because they are scared to talk about it.

He tells me that joking about race seems to be the easiest way for white kids to engage in dialog about this topic, since they are scared:

> **Conor:** Yeah, I mean because people don't like talking about it as a serious subject so they feel like they need to talk about it in some way or another so they just start joking about it to put it into conversation…they don't know how to talk about it and so they just start joking about it
>
> **Maggie:** Do you feel comfortable talking about it?
>
> **Conor:** Yeah, I'll talk about it.
>
> **Maggie:** What makes you different from other people, do you think?
>
> **Conor:** They are just scared of messing up. Like even me sometimes, I'll move on from the subject because I don't want to say something that will hurt someone's feelings, because there is just so much misunderstanding. But, yeah…it's kinda the same thing as when kids say like, oh you're gay—it doesn't mean anything. It means they don't know what else to say. But it is wrong.
>
> **Maggie:** So something completely unrelated to race will happen and—
>
> **Conor:** Yeah, people will say that….It is just some stupid thing that people come up with because they don't know what else to say. They can't think of anything else to say when they are mad at you….it's just kind of annoying.
>
> **Maggie:** What do you do when you hear that?
>
> **Conor:** You think, "well he obviously doesn't have any idea what that even means." Then you get mad at him and think they are stupid because that is stupid, what they just said.

Conor, like many of his peers, recognizes that white kids are scared to talk about race for fear that they might 'mess up.' Instead, they either avoid the topic altogether or they make light of it through jokes and through calling each other "racists." Conor very assertively tells me that he believes this is "stupid."

Given that I interviewed some of the other kids with whom Conor goes to school, it is of interest to note that some of his peers came to similar conclusions about why this phenomenon happens but include themselves in the feeling that race was a hard thing to talk about. For instance, Conor's best friend Mark, son of a famous artist and music professor at the local

university who has lived abroad and plans to go to high school abroad, tells me the following

when I ask him if kids call each other "racists" at school:

> **Mark:** Yeah. Like you'll be talking to someone and they'll be like, "Oh, I'm going to this shopping mall after school." And people will be like, "Oh blah-de-blah-blah, that's where all the Black kids hang out. Why are you going there?" And then someone else will call that person racist. Or, just like, a teacher will get mad at a Hispanic person and they'll be like, "Are you mad at me cuz I'm Mexican?" And just things like that.

> **Maggie:** Do you ever think there are really serious claims being made?

> **Mark:** No, it's more joking. I mean because people don't like talking about it as a serious subject so they feel like they need to talk about it in some way or another so they just start joking about it to put it into conversation and it just becomes accepted because people don't really seem to realize, or they haven't lived in a time period where that wasn't really acceptable so it just becomes part of their conversation.

> **Maggie:** Would it be accurate to say that some kids actually want to talk more about race but they don't know how to, or they don't feel comfortable?

> **Mark:** Uh, I feel that it's more that they, it's that it's something they need to know about, but they don't know how to talk about it and so they just start joking about it and it gets mixed in and they just start talking about it like that.

> **Maggie:** Do you feel comfortable talking about it?

> **Mark:** Yeah, I'll talk about it.

> **Maggie:** What makes you different from other people, do you think?

> **Mark:** That they think that it can be misunderstood so easily that they are unwilling to talk about it in case someone does take it seriously because it's hard to tell. And they are just scared of messing up. Like even me sometimes, I'll move on from the subject because I don't want to say something that will hurt someone's feelings, because they can't tell if I'm being serious or not.

Both Conor and Mark talk about how white kids at their school are afraid to talk openly about

race, despite the fact that the school's curriculum does include multicultural lessons. Like

Charlotte tells me, it seems that these lessons are not as critically engaged as they otherwise

could be and that again, the school seems to not be providing children with tools and

opportunities to talk about race. In addition, while Conor does not say he is uncomfortable,

Mark, who has a childhood context that parallels that of Conor in many ways, admits that he

"doesn't want to hurt anyone's feelings." Conor is does not appear uncomfortable talking about what he views as racism. For instance, we shift gears and I ask him if he has any concrete examples of racism in today's society. He goes on to tell me about immigration laws:

> In Arizona, I know they passed a law that you have to…carry around your photo ID or something and police, they're always stopping Latinos because they don't believe that they're Americans. They believe that they're illegal immigrants but really they're just picking on people that are a different race… I think it's really wrong and racist.

While Conor speaks with his father a great deal about immigration policy, in this case, he turns what perhaps was a discussion with his dad about Arizona into his own position that he is willing to articulate and argue. In addition to talking about immigration laws that he views as racist, Conor also talks about the police in general and kids getting in trouble, though he sees the police's behavior in this case as less about race and more about poor, black kids being unsupervised by their parents, because their parents are out "trying to get work":

> Mostly, people who get in trouble with the police, most of the time, they aren't as wealthy as others. And they are usually black. And they are um they are doing those bad things because they have parents that are never with them because they are always trying to get work and the kids don't have like someone to tell them what's wrong and right and so they do bad things and maybe they don't know they are bad until they, the police get them.

While Jennifer and Greg talk a great deal about mass incarceration, based on what they tell me and based on their professions and the books I see in their home, it is clear that Conor has interpreted what he has observed in his context, both from his parents and from other sources, and has produced a unique explanation for racial disparities in the criminal justice system that seems to partially reflect his parents' view and also include his own thinking; that is, his parents tend to focus on the ways in which laws, the courts, and practices of law enforcement officials target black Americans, while Conor's explanation is that of structural conditions that impact parenting practices. While Conor suggests poor, black children get in trouble because their parents are trying to gain employment and are not home to parent, his argument is certainly

different than those held by his parents, as well as different than those of Sheridan children who, for example, tell me, without pause, that black people are more inclined to participate in crime.

Another concrete example of racism Conor gives me relates to public policy. Conor tells me that he thinks it is bad that the governor of his state is trying to cut money that goes to poor people, who also tend to be people of color:

> A lot of poor people in this area are also black and Latino so it's pretty much racist, I think, like if they can't even eat or whatever. And it's like those races. That's just not right. I mean, really I think everyone should be able to eat. And have a home. Also, god forbid you bring food into the Capitol, but you can bring GUNS into the Capitol. That makes total sense (sarcastically). I dunno. It is all so ridiculous. It just makes no sense at all.

Conor is very passionate and emotional as he makes this statement, as well as many others he makes in reference to a massive state politics argument going on in his community at the time of data collection about collective bargaining rights and the state budget. I ask him if he talks to his parents about "this stuff" and he says that yes, he does talk to his parents, but he talks to his friends about this stuff more "because it is important and I talk to my friends about important stuff." His handmade protest sign from the winter protests is in the hall closet, which he shows me later that day. The bright green sign reads in black marker in his handwriting: "I support my teachers!" Notably, despite Conor's parents' insistence that they "beat" discussions of race "into him," Conor perceives his friends and peers as being where he talks about these topics most often.

Conor has many friends, but only a handful of really close pals, most of whom live near his house. His two closest friends are both "from Europe" but he has other friends at school who, he tells me, are black. He tells me that his school is about 30% black, that "there's not really any Latinos, Hispanics" and that are "there are not many Asians either." "The rest are white," he tells me. He tells me that while he is noticing more segregation as time goes on ("some people are more sectioned off"), he has known many of these kids for his entire life and thus social circles

are somewhat integrated. He tells me that he thinks if all the kids at his school lived closer together, that there would probably be more "mixing" because people tend to be friends with those who live very close to them, especially walking to school and playing outside and being on the same soccer team. He tells me his soccer team is "pretty much all white." The predominantly-white nature of the outside-of-school soccer scene is obvious to anyone observing the many soccer games that take place on fall and spring Saturday mornings in Evergreen, this lies in stark contrast with the school related sports events. For instance, in addition to attending numerous soccer games in Evergreen, I also attended volleyball games at the middle school, which if anything were comprised more of children of color than white children. From talking with members of the community including parents and teachers and strangers at these sorts of events, activities organized outside of school are segregated, with things like soccer being comprised of mostly white kids. The most common explanation for this pattern is money: parents have to pay for activities both at school and outside of school. However, the school activities provide transportation and waivers for low-income students are available. As such, these school-based activities draw a more diverse group of children to them, both racially and socioeconomically.

Conor ultimately spends a great deal of time away from his parents and it is in these spaces and as part of these cultural routines where he also gathers information through social interaction that he then uses to produce his own knowledge about this subject. Conor tells me about what he observes about black kids at his school, for example:

Conor: The teachers are always yelling at the black kids in my class.

Maggie: Why do you think that is?

Conor: Well, I mean, sometimes the kids are not following directions, but lots of kids don't follow directions so it's like kinda weird…Sometimes the black kids will be like, "You are yelling at me cuz I'm black!" The teachers really hate that. (laughing)

Maggie: Why do they hate that?

Conor: Because they do NOT want to be considered a racist. Like, no matter WHAT.

Maggie: Do you talk to the kids who get yelled at about the teacher's behavior?

Conor: Yeah, I mean, my friend Drake and I talk about it a lot. He is always mad at our math teacher. Drake talks to the other black kids about it too I think and anyway, I just try to be a good friend to him.

Teachers and peers are not the only people with whom Conor interacts in the Petersfield area. Exposure to strangers is also an aspect of Conor's life. He tells me about his experience walking down the street and getting shouted at by a homeless man, who he describes as being black:

> We were just walking down the street and there was some guy who got mad because I don't really know why but we were walking down the street and he started saying that just because he is black, doesn't mean anything and stuff and yelling right at me. I mean, he probably had some sort of sickness. Like my parents said maybe he had a mental sickness and didn't think right. I dunno. Anyway, I was kind of freaked out because this random person is just yelling at me all of a sudden. Afterwards, my parents talked to me about it and told me it wasn't his fault or anything. That he needed help. We talk about that kind of stuff a lot, like how there is no help for him really, like why is he even living on the street in the first place, you know?

Here, Jennifer and Greg help to contextualize Conor's experience. They model empathy rather than fear, and try to get their son to see this situation in a way that is productive rather than scary or dismissive. They also help Conor talk about and process what he observes in the social context they have shaped for him.

Later, I ask Conor about the American Dream and if he believes anyone can "make it" if they work hard enough. He literally laughs in my face in response and launches into a discussion about unequal schooling in America:

> **Conor:** I think that people with more money should NOT get a better education than people that don't have money. Everyone should get equal opportunity. I mean, like, in Sheridan, it is rich and like just by seeing the high school there, I thought that was a private school but [my dad] said it was just a new public school. Another thing is private school. Private schools are just wrong. I had the chance to go to a private school but… [my parents] rather have me go to public school. And I am GLAD.

> **Maggie:** What is wrong with private schools, in your opinion?
>
> **Conor:** Well, again, I think that just because if you, people with money, they should NOT get a better education than other people. It's not fair.

The topic of "rich people" comes up at another point in time with Conor. We are discussing how people become rich. Conor insists that, "most people that have a lot of money, inherit it. The majority of the people." I ask Conor what race he thinks most of these people who have inherited money are. He answers immediately, "white." I ask him how people become poor and he tells me:

> **Conor:** The same reason actually I guess. They could be born poor…or you could lose all your money in like during the Depression or something and you lost it all because of the bank, the bank shut down.
>
> **Maggie:** So, why do you think there are people who look at the poor and just think that they are lazy?
>
> **Conor:** Cuz they don't know what it's like to try and get a job. I mean, like every person that's like that, I'm SURE they are trying to get a job. … they wouldn't be that way if there was more jobs.

In this case, Conor explains poverty not in terms of individual failure, but in terms of structural problems connected to the lack of available jobs as well as how both wealth and poverty as transmitted across generations.

Conclusions

Overall, after spending time with Conor, it is obvious that he holds ideological views that challenge dominant ways of thinking about race and class, along with the rhetorical tools necessary to articulate these views. Jennifer and Greg play a role in how their son produces racial knowledge, but this role is not limited to the conversations they have, even if they do attempt to "beat it into him." Greg and Jennifer Norton-Smith intentionally work hard on an ongoing basis, from the small subtle things to the large obvious things, to teach their children about race, racism and forms of privilege. These parents are motivated to do so and have the priorities that they do

based on the experiences they have had in their own youth, in college and working in law. They want their children to understand history, how the law works, current struggles faced by people of color, current events, and to be aware of their own internal bias and racism. Greg and Jennifer create scenarios that ensure interracial interaction through their relationship with Marcus as part of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program and through their travel experiences, attendance at various cultural events, interracial friendships, and commitment to the diverse public school. However, when it comes to extracurricular activities that Conor wants to participate in on his own, it seems that the Norton-Smiths struggle to design racially integrated experiences.

Greg and Jennifer, like other Evergreen parents, try to direct the racial knowledge their kids' produce, though they recognize that this as a challenging (and ultimately) impossible task. They constantly intervene in the children's lives, correcting them in explicit ways when they say something believed to be in accurate or an uninformed interpretation of an event. They constantly worry about what messages their children are picking up at school, especially messages that are not positive about black children or families. So too do they worry about the neighborhood and broader community of which they are a part. Though they believe they have intentionally sought out the best place for them to live in Petersfield, is the community of Evergreen overrun with people like them, which in turn pushes out the families that allow Evergreen to be a relatively integrated space? How do they balance their enormous privilege with their desire for diversity in their lives, especially given the social power and prestige that they hold in contrast to others? While these challenges are present in the lives of parents like the Norton-Smiths, these parents do not avoid engaging with them. Rather, Jennifer and Greg embrace these questions and contemplate them, talking them over with friends and with their children.

Overall, Jennifer and Greg Norton-Smith approach the racial socialization of their children in active, everyday, regular direct, and deliberate ways. As a result of their parents' approach to racial socialization, Conor and Charlotte have tools at their disposal that can be deployed in their everyday lives—tools that are not available to children in other contexts of childhood and tools that potentially help cultivate anti-racist praxis in Conor and Charlotte.

CHAPTER 8: The Patterson Family—A Mundane Approach

Margot and Tyler Patterson are both in middle school. Margot is twelve and her brother is ten. They have a younger sister Jane who is eight. Margot is tall for her age and has big blue eyes. She wears large glasses and was just beginning to start talking about and exploring makeup and straightening her hair when I first met her. Her hair was actually a major point of discussion throughout my data collection period, as I spent time with this family over the entire 22 month period of data collection: Doris spent six months trying to convince Margot to cut her hair, especially after an unpleasant lice epidemic at the local school that involved Margot. Doris also wants her daughter to make her own choices about her hair, so she never forced her daughter to cut it. About halfway through my data collection period, Margot finally agreed to change her hair. She also got "hipster glasses," or glasses with large dark plastic frames (after her glasses were broken at school) and grew about six inches over my time collecting data.

Margot participates in a number of sports including basketball, rowing and volleyball over time, but her real passion has always been to curl up by herself with a book and read without being bothered, especially by her younger brother. Her mother, Doris Patterson, tells me that Margot devours books, so much so that they decided to purchase a Kindle to avoid collecting so many paperback novels. Margot also wants to read "adult" books and Doris talks to me about how to decide what is "appropriate" for a child, especially if they want to read it. Margot is an excellent student and prides herself on her ability to ace any assignment or exam.

Doris approaches parenting from a more laid-back approach than most other parents in my study. Despite her class status, Doris believes in a natural growth model of socialization (Lareau 2003), encouraging her kids to play outside, find things to do that are not organized activities, and to spend time with family. While Margot does participate in some extracurricular

activities, almost all of these activities take place during the school hours or in a location near

home. Doris describes her feelings on after-school activities:

> **Doris**: Frankly, I'm not a fan of extracurriculars. I have enough trouble just keeping up with their homework and stuff so I don't pursue a lot of that.

> **Maggie**: Is that a typical approach of parents around here?

> **Doris**: I don't know, it kind of depends. Like the parents I'm friends with, tend to be more like me where they are like "Uggggggggghhhh, going to ANOTHER soccer. AGAIN. It's happening A LOT." Um, but I know there are parents who are way more like, you know, like Margot has this one friend Zoey that she talks about and she does a TON of stuff. She is an only child, her parents are slightly older and I think they are really invested in taking her to do that stuff. I'm busier. I don't, you know, if you can do it yourself, great, but I'm not going to facilitate all this stuff. It's not mainly the parents I interact with though. They are more in line with me—working parents, etc….I would be really happy if there were none [extracurriculars]….I did drama in high school, I had to take the bus home while everyone else was getting picked up by their parents. So I feel like if you want to do it, you should do it. But we both have lives, you know. There's a baseline, I support them with school, but then from there, you know, it's gotta be worth it. Margot got into this Youth Choir and I was like, "You're not doing that, it's so intense. It was so many days a week and the parents had to do fundraising and I was like NO! I am not fundraising."

Doris is a professional woman who works full-time and is committed to not living a life

of stress and over-commitment. Doris is divorced from Margot's father, but she has a great

relationship with her ex-husband, and they share child-rearing responsibilities. The kids spend a

week with Doris and a week with their father, and their dog Fred, a golden retriever, up until

when he unfortunately died, would go back and forth with the kids. Margot's father owns a large

home in the Apple Hills neighborhood along the lake, mentioned in the Sheridan chapters of this

dissertation, while Doris is currently renting a house in the Evergreen neighborhood. Doris has a

Ph.D. in Gender Studies and works at a university in a nearby city as a program coordinator.

Background of Doris

Doris grew up in an inter-racial family right outside of the city of Cleveland, Ohio in a

predominantly-white, working class neighborhood. While her parents were white, Doris had a

number of adoptive siblings, some of whom were black. Her parents also adopted children with

disabilities, so she grew up in a home with kids who had a range of experiences. Doris explains

to me how as children, she and her siblings observed outsiders identifying their families as

"somewhat different." As Doris tells me:

> Because [our family] was intermixed, and because we were young when it was happening, we always sort of perceived of everyone as being in the family. People on the outside however definitely were interested in making very clear distinctions between who was biological and who was adopted….People from our church would always be like, "Oh your mom is such a saint" but I know there was also a sense of "why do they have so many kids?" you know, there's like this sense that my family made people uncomfortable.

Here Doris is referring not only to the racial diversity that perhaps made people uncomfortable,

but also to the number of children her mother adopted. However, when I ask Doris more

specifically about what it was like growing up with children who were a different race than her,

she immediately describes the differences in how she and her one sister in particular saw the

world as well as how the world treated them differently. Doris, the eldest in her family, grew up

with the awareness that people around her perceived her family as different than the norm and

that individual members of her family had different experiences in the world as a result of their

race.

> My sister was way more vocal about the racial differences and would talk a lot about you know, her treatment, like her issues with my parents being because she is Black or that they didn't understand her because they were white, etc. She was also going to public schools more because she got kicked out of all the Catholic ones so she was around more diverse people and I think my parents just always conceived of it as you know, you just don't think about people's differences that way. My dad was very invested in like speaking correctly so he and my sister had a lot of conflict of that because she would use slang and he really didn't like that at all. He always, I remember I had this conversation with him when I got to college when I was learning about the history of dialects and things and I was like, actually it's not just bad grammar, there's a whole history that goes with it and he was like, he didn't buy that, you know. For him, there's right ways to speak and everyone's capable of doing it and if you're not doing it, it's because you are refusing to or you are less intelligent. My sister talked about it and we heard her, and I think that probably added to some of the discomfort in the church community, the fact that, because basically the only Black people in the church community were the two Black people in my family.

Doris, as a child, learned a variety of lessons as a result of having a black adoptive sister about

what it would be like to grow up in a white community, as well as a white family, and be

misunderstood/gawked over by the white people in that community and family. While Doris

mentions college as a time in which she learned more formally about issues to do with race and

language, for instance, her own childhood was filled with moments in which she was exposed to

talking, hearing, and thinking about race, racial inequality and racial conflict.

> Doris also describes her class background to me as "middle-to-working class":

> **Maggie:** You were talking about class differences earlier. Did those play out between kids?

> **Doris**: Sure, absolutely…I think people sort of grouped up sort of geographically which also tended to be class based so like the wealthy suburbs, a lot of those girls hung out together, and you could sort of just tell by—we had uniforms, so there wasn't a huge variation in clothing but like cars, if you had a job after school or not, what people were doing on weekends so I hung out mainly with my friend Maureen and we both had jobs. We were more like middle to working class and then we had friends, I had a couple friends who were more like upper class but there was always a little tension because they had different priorities and different things they had to be doing.

> **Maggie**: What do you mean by tension?

> **Doris**: I think me and Maureen and other people had a sense of ourselves as not living in these big cul-de-sac houses, like I would go hang out there but no one ever hung out at my house um and you know like the way their parents treated them, way more involved, way more gifts and things as opposed to my family, you just sort of had to work for everything you get and we weren't really into a lot of material stuff. You would just have to buy it yourself. So people go to the mall a lot for their activities but we didn't do that so much.

After leaving her childhood home, Doris went to a small liberal arts college. Her college

experience allowed her to sort through some of the complicated thoughts and feelings she had as

a child growing up in a white community with black siblings and being perceived as "different"

or "odd" by other people:

> **Doris**: The dorm I chose to live in my freshman year was 3rd World House so there was like 5 white people and it was very like, a ton of dialogue about race and power, etc. so I was really at a loss in a lot of ways. I definitely had a lot of beliefs and liberal sensibilities, which was why I was there, but I just hadn't really dealt with many people of color and it was scary. Also, I just had to get over a hump of feeling like whatever I said was going to be wrong. Um, and getting to the point where—and I took a lot of classes too in like African American history.

> **Maggie:** What was your major?

> **Doris:** It ended up being English but I started in Sociology—I took a lot of classes on race and I just felt like I shouldn't or couldn't say anything in those classes so I was learning, but I wasn't

contributing at all and I really had this sense that the students of color were the only ones who were supposed to be talking and it took me a long time to get to the point where I realized that yeah we were all equal but I was putting people of color on this weird pedestal, like they were the only ones who could say anything but also like protecting myself from saying anything wrong. So, having friends who were um not white really helped with that, sort of understanding people as personalities, not just categories. Uh, so that's why I think being in schools with people of color, having to deal with these issues a lot as they come up as opposed to delaying it and dealing with it all at once, which is so hard, yeah, and that's what I want for my kids.

As a result of growing up in a diverse family with racial tension between family members and with outsiders, attending a college where she was forced to come to terms with her privilege and fears, and developing meaningful relationships with people of color, Doris talks about whiteness in critical ways, and she hopes her children will do so as well. However, she does not believe in pushing her children to adopt her own ideas. Rather, she takes what she calls "a mundane approach" to talking about race and inequality.

A Mundane Approach to Talking about Race

Given how important her college years were to her, and how much this experience changed how she thought about race relations, I ask Doris if she has conversations with her kids about the things that she learned in college about race or about her family of origin with whom she is still relatively close:

> **Doris**: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. Yeah. Definitely. Um, and you know, [the kids] are around my family a lot because my sister Amelia who has down syndrome and George who is autistic and Black still live with my mom and Chris who my mom adopted after Bart died who is in a wheelchair. So they are very aware of that when we are in Cleveland so I talk about, I think there is often an inclination to pity people with disabilities so we talk about that if it comes up too.
>
> **Maggie**: Like, what do you mean?
>
> **Doris**: Oh "that is too bad, wouldn't it be awful," and then I'm like, "well let's think about Amelia or George, does it seem like their life is awful? Or do they just have a sort of a different experience with the world?" There are some things yeah but, um, and then race stuff, um I mean, a lot of it—I don't even know how that comes up really. Like in terms of explicit conversations. I think the race stuff is more subtle.

Doris describes the conversations she has with her children about disability, framing the discussion around human difference rather than pitying someone. She then describes the

moments in which she can recall race coming up in a conversation with her children, and also

reflects on her general approach to talking to her kids about race—an approach that varies from

other parents in the study.

> **Maggie:** Can you think of any examples of how race comes up in more subtle ways?
>
> **Doris:** Well, there was this time when Tyler was talking about—this was recent—when this Native American came to talk about the history of Native Americans in the US and talked about issues with white people and Black people and [Tyler] was talking about how one of his friends was saying the guy was racist because he talked about "black" and "white" people and I was like, "Tyler, that doesn't make him racist. He is describing these groups and the issues they had," and Tyler was like, "That's what I thought too, blah blah blah. That you know, it's not racist." So in that sense, yeah, so I think he, we have had talks about how it is fine to like identify people's race or whatever…For a long time, Tyler would call people in his class "brown" if they were black and I wouldn't correct that. He has started saying "black" more recently, probably because he has heard it. Um, but he also had, he has this friend Chris for the first few years of school whose family are Spanish speakers, I think the mom is bilingual and the dad definitely isn't though. So, you know, Tyler was always very interested in the fact that Chris speaks Spanish and I'm sure we talked about stuff then.

I ask her how she approaches these conversations:

> **Doris:** I just try *to take a mundane approach to racial stuff where* it's like not a big deal to talk about it. Margot has had a few things where there's people she doesn't like and then she brings up the fact that they are black or not um and I'm like, "well that's not really relevant, right?" Like you know, she is just like "Jasmine doesn't like me" and often it is in the context of her feeling affronted because the students of color claim some sort of status as being—you know like not oppressed but having to deal with prejudgments or whatever—and she doesn't really believe in that and then she gets very sort of uptight about it. Like I heard her telling you how people of color can be racist against white people. (rolling eyes) So I get the impression that she is hearing conversations in her school where the students of color are talking about being students of color and like the consequences of it and it seems like that is an issue for her and I usually try to be like, "Well think about it." She definitely understands the concept of stereotyping and discrimination but I think she has a really hard time applying it to individuals she knows. So, sometimes I try to think about that. But she also just perceives of them as all being equals and its your personality and what you do or don't do that defines how you are treated. Like with the kids she is in school with, but then she understands how groups of people, like with gender, face structural issues.

Doris wants her children to feel comfortable identifying someone's race, as long as they are not

following that identification with judgments of that person based on their race. Doris also

recognizes that her daughter interacts in a wide range of contexts and will form racial logic as a

result of those interactions. Subsequently, while Doris sees role as a parent being to ask her

daughter questions, she does not try to "beat it into them." Rather, she welcomes the agency of

her kids and tries to make sense of why her kids are coming to conclusions that they are so that

she can ask questions that urge her kids to think more carefully about their thoughts or reactions,

while not trying to trample on the knowledge they are in the midst of producing. She tells me

that she "knows my kids will form their own ideas so I can't force anything on them but I can get

them to think. I'd rather have them not just repeat politically correct statements but rather think

for themselves."

Doris and I also discuss class privilege and social mobility. I ask Doris if she talks to her

kids about the American Dream, and if so, what she says to them:

> **Doris**: You know, I remember being a kid and being like, "I don't like the idea that the fact that I'm successful in school and smart isn't just due to my capabilities and hard work" so and she does well at school and I'm sure she gets, you know, positive reinforcement and sees other kids often of different characteristics than her getting negative reinforcement, so I'm guessing like the school stuff does not help her see her privilege. I can totally see her friends too, I mean, they all have the same liberal sensibilities but they also are all pretty successful, hardworking, you know sort of, straightedge girls. Like they're not getting into trouble, they want to be the teacher's pet, and they're not thinking about like the fact that other kids maybe have other things going on in their lives. They just do their work, do their activities. That's it.
>
> **Maggie**: So, do you let Margot like sort things out herself or do you ever tell her what you think? Do you ever try to influence her?
>
> **Doris:** Well, I have often framed things as some people think this and other people think this. This is what I think and do. Um, like this is how we have always talked about god and religion and like a lot of people believe in this. I don't but you can decide whatever but here is why I think this way. Um, *I think with stuff like race and gender, I'm probably more assertive about it.* Uh, but they, they definitely I think, Margot for sure, understands that there are different opinions. Like she knows she is way more invested in certain forms of self-presentation. She definitely gets different things from her father's side of the family—they are way more material focused. So she understands there are competing ways of approaching the world and I think she respects mine, like the meat eating thing—for her that is uncomfortable because she understands what I'm saying [about why I don't eat meat] and I have articulated many times that you don't have to do this, but I'm like, but you should understand the choice you're making and what that involves and she does but she also just doesn't want to have to make that choice so, um, so I think for her, yeah I mean, she is young. Um and also there is just a certain amount of pushback where even if I'm like, you should do this or this, I can't actually make her believe or do the things I believe and do.

Doris talks to her children about a range of topics, evidenced not only by what she says to me in her formal interview but also as a result of what I observe after spending time with her family. However, Doris is more invested in getting her children to think about the ethics behind their choices or the factors underlying their viewpoints than teaching overt and specific messages about these topics. Rather than trying to "beat [ideas] into them," Doris tries to get her kids to think for themselves, providing them with information when necessary, correcting any misinformation, but ultimately, encouraging her children to answer questions like "Why do you think that is?" or "What if you were in that situation?" or "Is there really anything wrong with that?" or switching the way the kids are talking about race around.

For example, one evening when I am watching television with Doris and Margot, Margot is talking about how the black girls at school always "segregate themselves off" at recess and in the lunchroom. Doris, without missing a beat, without even looking away from the television, and without reacting emotionally simply states, "You don't think that you and your white friends segregate yourself off from them?" to which Margot pauses to think about. Her response is, after a few moments, "Well, I guess I never thought about it that way." Doris responds with a comment about the television program and the discussion is dropped. Unlike other Evergreen parents, Doris does not make a big deal about her daughter's comments, nor does she really try to persuade her daughter overtly about how to make sense of the situation at school. Yet, as she tells me privately, she is very intentional in how she reacts to comments like this. She purposefully responds the ordinary way she does so that her daughter is urged to think through her argument more but without much emotion attached or through an impassioned lecture from her mother. Doris also writes blog posts for a university blog about issues of inequality and in speaking with her for only a few moments, it is clear that Doris's approach to topics like race in

other settings is direct and overt. Her choice to approach conversations about race or sexuality or gender in ways that are both assertive but also mundane is an explicit one and one that she uses intentionally as she believes her kids will learn to become independent thinkers and actors as a result.

Another example of an interaction between Doris and Margot and myself is described here in my field notes:

> Doris and I were drinking a glass of wine, chatting at the kitchen table after a vegan dinner that she made for us and the kids. Margot walked into the room with a pink permission slip she needed signed to participate in the sex education program her school was offering. Doris looked at the slip and then began describing to me a recent debate about the sex education program at Evergreen Middle School. She tells me how she does not know "even one parent who would not want their child to receive full, comprehensive sex education at our school" but that for some reason, the school was considering running an abstinence-only program in addition to the comprehensive program. Doris then nonchalantly turns and tells Margot, "Always use a condom if you are having sex with a man or a woman and always have one with you. You never know what might happen," and then turns back to me and continues talking about the political fight about sex education generally in the United States. Margot is listening intently to our conversation, and surprisingly, does not flinch or roll her eyes or say anything when her mother makes the condom comment. Rather, she nods her head and listens to our discussion. Later, I ask Doris about her comments about the condom and she tells me that she wants to "normalize" the discussion of sex with her kids without "making a big deal out of it." We then discuss her friend who purchased a sex toy for her teenage daughter and debate whether this is a sex-positive choice.

In general, while Doris approaches conversations about race or sexuality in ways that appear to be "mundane," the underlying objective is to take the stigma off of these topics by "normalizing" them into everyday, ordinary, even dull conversation and challenging her children to think more critically about their own interpretations of what they see in the world by assertively posing non-threatening but tough questions. Overall, Doris tries to approach the topic of race in an ordinary, regular kind of way.

Margot's Glasses

When I meet her, Margot is very upset by the fact that Malik, a boy in her school, tried to jump down seven stairs, causing her to fall and break her glasses. She tells me the story:

Margot: Well I need to back and up start by telling you about Dayvon. Dayvon is black. He's really disrespectful and like constantly talking out of turn. And like he's just like, he's just mean, just mean. And he's rude and he's mean. He's like rude to everyone. (Tyler! Stop! Go away!) He's rude to me. He's rude to this kid Hannah I know. He's really is rude to everyone. And then, he constantly said, he like, so sometimes I like intercept because I can't take it and I'm like. Like one time he was pulling this girl's hair, which I think he has a crush on, but it's not very nice to pull someone's hair! You know? And no one else likes him, but except for his friends, Patrick and Malik, who recently jumped like seven stairs. And I was at the bottom, and Malik BROKE MY GLASSES.

Maggie: Are those your new glasses?

Margot: Yeah.

Maggie: I love them.

Margot: Thanks. But it was like SEVEN stairs. He jumped and landed on me and I fell. My glasses fell off of my face. And my friend Molly, she was like, "oh, your glasses are broke." So I went to the nurse, and my mom found an emergency pair that I didn't know we had. So I went home because I didn't know we had that, and we were planning on just getting new glasses for me. But then my mom found these pairs of glasses that I had when I was like five. I'm like, thanks, Mom. Although I was kind of happy because then I didn't have to like not have glasses for a week. And actually, I was actually really happy because it turns out my prescription was over but those, they were so tiny on my face.

Maggie: That makes sense, if they were from when you were little.

Margot: Yeah and like sometimes? Like sometimes I like, so Daylon was pulling this girl Caitlyn's hair like a lot. He . . . like because he sat next to her. And she was like, if she like moved, then he would reach over farther. And I'm like, if she doesn't want you to touch her, she probably doesn't want to touch her! Leave her alone! And he's like, "shut up talking to me." So it's a combination of "shut up" and "stop talking to me," which he says a lot to me. I don't think I deserve it and neither do a lot of people. But like I don't really care because he's just annoying and mean and kind of a jerk.

Maggie: Why do you think he acts like that?

Margot: I don't know. To get attention. He's rude to other kids. He's rude to teachers. And I don't know. To get attention, and he'll laugh about it with his buds.

Maggie: Who are his buds?

Margot: Mostly Malik.

Maggie: He is the one that jumped down the stairs?

Margot: Yes, they all hang out together. I think sometimes it's in a group, but Patrick actually, when he's not in a group, he's not terrible. But like so mostly Daylon is like the worst of them. I sit next to him in two different, two periods and but like I like say something, and he's like, "shut up talking to me. Why are you always like talking to me when I'm not talking to you?" And I'm like, whatever. And I was taught by my parents not to say "shut up," so I don't say shut up. I just have this moral code that I will not say shut up. His parents clearly did not teach him not to say shut up. He is so annoying!

Margot is very upset with these three boys in her class: Daylon, Malik and Patrick. On other occasions, when she and I talk casually, she mentions the latest thing that Daylon has done to irritate her, like mimicking her voice when she yells at him, or not listening to the teacher and disrupting class. Like Anthony Hall, Margot hates it when people speak "out of turn" in the classroom, not raising their hand like they are supposed to, and she hates how Dayvon pulls girl's hair. She also hates how Malik decided to jump down the stairs, causing her to break her glasses. Stories like these in which children tease each other at school are common. What is unique about Margot's story, however, is the focus that she puts on the race of these three boys:

Margot: It is always the *black* kids, like Dayvon, who are like doing stupid things and getting yelled at by the teacher and it's like ALWAYS them.

Maggie: Why do you think that is?

Margot: I don't know. Maybe they like don't get enough attention at home so they misbehave at school but like pulling hair? That is like so—I don't get it!

Here, Margot mentions that the behavior of children like Dayvon may be the result of his parents not giving him enough attention. Margot, an overachiever, also looks down at kids like Dayvon who she believes does not try to excel at school:. "Why wouldn't you just do your work?" she tells me.

Again, intergroup contact can have both positive and negative effects. Clearly, a pattern seems to emerge from the kids' experiences at Evergreen Middle School in the various critical situational conditions for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice (like equal status, common

goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities) are not in place. It also appears that most of Margot's friends are white, and that subsequently Pettigrew's (1998) condition of potential of friendship formation may be limited for whatever reason.

Doris tells me at various points in time that she sometimes worries about what Margot is thinking and why. Does she just dislike these three boys at school, which is a typical occurrence in middle school kid culture? Is she associating the behavior of these boys with their race? Why is she mentioning their race and not the race of white kids who she tells stories about as well? Doris tells me that she tries to talk through all of this with Margot, using her "mundane approach" to it all but she wonders how much sinks in. She also expresses her frustration to me after overhearing Margot tell me while being interviewed that "white people can be racist too" and that being white does not bring unearned advantages. Doris tells me that she continues to try to work against these ideas that Margot produces by asking questions and challenging her to "think it through" and "recognize her privileges."

Margot understands herself as being privileged based on her family's class-status and citizenship-status, though does not recognize racial privilege as much as Doris would like her to:

> We are at a protest in downtown Petersfield and I ask Margot if she wants to go get a sign to hold up. She says yes. Doris gives us permission to walk up the steps of the State Capitol building and find a sign to hold up in the air. Margot turns to me and says, "I want a sign that represents how I feel!" We search through the various options of homemade signs as well as signs printed in bulk by various unions and organizations. Finally, Margot finds one that says, "We heart our educators!" She grabs the sign and tells me that this sign "speaks to her." I ask her why and she tells me that the state government is trying to take away her teacher's rights and that "it isn't fair." She also tells me that she "has a responsibility" to protest on behalf of her teachers because she "has the privilege" of being here and not having to worry about being fired from her job so she "needs to do something" with her privilege. She also tells me that many of the things the governor is trying to do will "hurt poor people and immigrants too" so she needs to stand up for them since maybe they can't be here to protest.

A few weeks after this protest, I am casually talking to Margot about privilege again, though this time I am directly asking her about white privilege:

Maggie: Do you think you have any privileges because you are white?

Margot: No. Because like if you're an immigrant, people that like were born in the U.S. have advantages over you…But I personally don't think like white people have any advantage other than in that way. I think like the civil rights movement was for a reason, and I think that reason did pretty well.

While she viewed herself as being in a position of privilege when advocating for her teachers, the poor and immigrants, Margot does not believe that she has privileges because she is white. What is so interesting about her statement is that I observed, on multiple occasions, her mother talk about whiteness or white privilege. Additionally, her little brother Tyler, interviewed around the same time as Margot, told me that he "definitely has privileges because he is white." Margot challenges or reworks the racial logic of many of the people around her, interpreting the Evergreen context in a way that varies from many of her peers and even her sibling. While this frustrates her mother, Doris sticks to her approach of talking with her daughter, and encourages more inter-racial interaction and experience in Margot's life.

Another point of concern that Doris has is related to the idea of "black people being racist too" and Margot's general defensiveness of her whiteness. Doris overhears this conversation:

Maggie: So do you think there's still racism today or do you think it's pretty much over?

Margot: I think there is still racism. I think through things people say, through assumptions, through stuff like that, through what people have heard, of course, obviously. Like stereotypes. Lots of people have stereotypes…But I don't, I guess it still happens, but like, I have never, I guess I *have* encountered it, but I personally don't think I'm like a racist or prejudice.

Maggie: What do you mean when you say you think you have encountered racism?

Margot: I mean, I'm not totally sure, like Dayvon, he's always, "you're being a racist," like whatever. I'm like, "Have you ever though that you can be a racist too? Just because we're white doesn't mean we are always racist. Black people can be racist too. I didn't know if you knew that, Dayvon." (pretending as if she is talking to him in a condescending tone) But yeah, I think I'm, the people that I hang out with aren't racist and stuff, so I don't really know any racism that I've seen.

In some ways, her thoughts resemble a blend of colorblind and color-conscious thinking. However, Margot also thinks black people can be racist to white people, although this really is put only in terms of interacting with her nemesis Dayvon, which makes one question to what extent most of these ideas about race are the result of very particular interactions with one child at school who she does not like. Doris is frustrated by this: "I heard her say that and I worry about that." Doris believes that her kids will form their own ideas about race based on their experiences in diverse places, like the public schools in the Evergreen part of Petersfield, and that as a parent, her job is to try to help complicate the ideas that her kids produce when their ideas challenge the way that Doris sees the world. Doris worries about whether her approach is working—are her kids learning to think critically? Specifically, Doris worries about Margot as she says, "Tyler seems to get it in a way that Margot does not."

In terms of how she talks about race with her kids, Doris herself is challenging the more popular approach to racial socialization in Evergreen which is the "beat it into them" approach, as described by Mr. Norton-Smith, and the common avoidance approach as described by Sheridan families. However, the cultural routines that Margot and Tyler engage in as a result of the context Doris has constructed for them, provide them with opportunities to produce their own ideas about race. But, in no way are Margot and Tyler simply adopting the views of their mother or father. If anything, Margot is challenging her mother's ideas, even as her mother tries to subtly nudge Margot to think more critically about race. Some of Margot's knowledge about race is tied to her experiences interacting with the three black boys in her class who like to tease her. However, I also attend one of Margot's volleyball games and witness her interacting in a very friendly and upbeat manner with black, Latina and Asian girls on her team, girls that she calls her friends and about whom she never has anything negative to say. Thus, I wonder to what

extent gender complicates Margot's relationship with the three black boys in her class.

Regardless, Margot is in the midst of forming racial commonsense and this commonsense is

produced as a result of her interactions, cultural routines and race talk with kids at school, with

her family at home, and in the other realms of her social context of childhood.

Finally, not all of what Margot tells me challenges the dominant "anti-racist" discourse

present in Evergreen. I ask Margot whether or not schools are unequal:

> **Margot:** Definitely unequal. I think definitely schools that have little funding, people, it's
> unfair…it's not cool and it's not fair. But like we can, like people can do stuff about it. Like
> people can give that school more funding. But a lot of people just are like, oh, I go to this place,
> so I really don't care about those other people that have to go there. This is partly coming from
> TV knowledge, but…
>
> **Maggie:** From what?
>
> **Margot:** TV knowledge. But, no, I mean, this is, definitely. Because if there's schools that
> don't have the funding to teach as much, then you probably don't know as much...a lot of times,
> if there's a bad school, I think people like drop out early or they aren't as, they really aren't as
> pushed to go to college or to get that, a good job. Even though they could. And it's a lot of times
> schools where minorities go. So they like drop out or they don't do school anymore because it
> was a bad school and they weren't learning much. It's not their fault. It's the unequal funding
> fault. And then so they just don't have the education to do what they want.

Here, Margot talks about educational inequality, and brings race into the discussion in a way that

is different than how she talks about Daylon not doing his schoolwork. Here, Margot says that it

is not the students' fault but rather the fault of structural factors leading to inadequate funding

and students' rational reactions to "bad schools." At another point in time, Margot talks to me

about the police: "They go to the mostly black places and then they like look for people breaking

the law. But like not even big laws. Just stupid things like speeding and then a lot of times they

arrest them. They would NEVER like, they wouldn't do that in my neighborhood." Still further,

Margot tells me that if she could change one thing about the United States, it would be related to

equal health care for all:

Margot: I think healthcare is a right. I'm like President, I mean, I'm like Mr., what's his name . . . the dude that was running for president before Obama was elected? Well I don't remember but he said it was a privilege. Obama said it was a right, and I agree with Obama. Because everyone should be able to like get, have, if they get like sick or if they are in an accident, or they are like homeless or live in a housing project or whatever, then I think they should be able to be able to pay to get better.

Maggie: So what would you say to people that say that, people who don't like work or something like that, they didn't get to have healthcare. What would you say to them?

Margot: People that don't work? Well, first of all, the economy is really bad. So there's a reason. Also sometimes it is harder for like minorities to get jobs because of like stereotypes and all that stuff. Or, I know like, that sometimes moms can't even like be with their baby and they because almost they have to go back and work right away or else they get fired so that is a reason. Those are reasons. Like why people may not be working. But even if they don't work for a, for like no reason, apparent reason, but they should still get healthcare. If you can't pay for it, you still should be able to be helped when you are sick. That is why I say it is a RIGHT. So, yeah, I think everyone should get it and be helped.

Here, Margot points to numerous structural explanations for why people may not be able to find work, inclusive of racial discrimination in the labor market, the economy, or even family-work policy problems. These explanations are much different than her discussion of all the black kids getting in trouble because they don't care about school and don't get enough attention at home.

Conclusions

I argue in this chapter that (1) even parents who have constructed almost parallel contexts for their children in terms of neighborhood, school, travel experiences, etc., approach discussions of race in different ways. In the Patterson family, Doris talks about race using a more "mundane" and subtle approach than the "beat it into them" approach of the Norton-Smiths. Thus, while kids like Conor Norton-Smith and Margot Patterson experience the world in very similar ways due to the context in which they are embedded, one unique difference that stands out lies in how their parents explicitly talk about race in America. As a result, while these kids are both growing up in the Evergreen context, there are differences between parenting approaches when it comes to talking about race with middle school aged children.

I also argue that Margot produces knowledge about race that sometimes challenges the dominant, color-conscious, "progressive", "anti-racist" racial discourse of Evergreen shared by many of the white, affluent adults who live here, as well as the kids. This is similar to how children in Sheridan challenge the color-blind racial discourse prevalent in their community. Sometimes, the way Margot understands race contradicts how her parents and peers make sense of race. Yet, at other times, her ideas map more closely onto the ideas of other kids growing up in the same context and those of Doris. Further, while in other parts of their context of childhood such as at home or with friends, they produce color-conscious, anti-racist logic, there is something about being in a diverse school that lacks adult leadership and critical engagement with multiculturalism and dialogs about race. Rather, these topics are avoided, as described by Cara Lacey, and events at school between children reinforce stereotypes and lead kids to drawing conclusions that contradict their parents intentions. Social psychological research on race and intergroup contact provides a useful framework for understanding the formation of these negative views about people of color (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998). Findings from Lewis (2004) about race-making in schools also speaks to this finding.

Overall, in the community of Evergreen, I find that parents construct a color-conscious racial context of childhood for their kids. Most Evergreen parents seek to cultivate an anti-racist praxis in their children and therefore behave in ways that promote both antiracist consciousness and praxis. While some parents are more explicit in their attempts, others are more subtle or "mundane" about it. All of the parents, however, intervene frequently when they notice that their child's behavior and statements are in their opinion discriminatory or prejudicial, though some parents want their children to come to their own conclusions after thinking critically while other parents want their children to understand and retain very specific perspectives. Part of the

"multifarious nature of whiteness" thus involves the awareness that the process of white racial socialization as well as the child outcomes of this process vary in meaningful and significant ways both within and across different racial contexts of childhood. This final point will be explored more thoroughly in Part III of this dissertation.

PART III: WHEATON HILLS

In Part III of this dissertation, I examine how the process of white racial socialization works in families where parents deploy color-conscious ideas about race yet make parenting decisions that appear to contradict these ideas. I find that parents in Wheaton Hills, the third neighborhood in my study, provide narratives about race that are similar to the narratives expressed by color-conscious parents in Evergreen. However, the behaviors of this third group of parents do not always align with their color-conscious ideas. This contradiction in parents' ideas and behaviors have significant consequences for how the children in these families produce knowledge about race. I argue that this variation in child outcomes is due to differences in how parents construct racial contexts of childhood in these two places, despite their similar ideological views.

Unlike parents in Evergreen, I find that parents in Wheaton Hills participate in what I call "justified avoidance." Justified avoidance refers to one's participation in dialog about the need to challenge racial oppression and structural racism yet a reluctance to engage in actions that would seem to follow from such values. Wheaton Hills parents offer socially acceptable justifications for why they are precluded from engaging in the types of behaviors that parents seeking to cultivate an antiracist praxis prioritize—behaviors that seek to "address proximal and distal forms of racially disparate treatment" (Forman 2004, 44). Drawing on rationales inclusive of "the obesity epidemic," their religious affiliation, their child's happiness, their priority of academic excellence, and their child's status as "gifted and talented," the majority of the parents I interviewed in Wheaton Hills, justify their avoidance of public schools, community events focused on open dialogs about local inequality in which large numbers of black parents are present, support for programs designed to reduce the racial achievement gap, and engagement

with the perspectives of the people of color around them *at the same time that they recognize and speak to existence and problem of structural racism*. I refer to this phenomenon as "justified avoidance." Unlike aversive racism, however, even when Wheaton Hills parents can get away with "expressing distaste for blacks," they are cautious to do so, as they seem to be having some type of internal struggle with themselves. As one mother put it to me during our discussion of whether she perceives unknown black teenagers as threatening, "If I'm honest, yes. I do feel threatened. I don't want to feel this way, but I do. And I have to check myself. I would never admit this to my kids but it's the truth."

I argue that this practice of "justified avoidance" is a new form of racism—individuals appear to be ideologically "progressive" or "liberal" and sometimes even self-identify as "anti-racist," yet behave in ways that reproduce the racial status quo and maintain current structural arrangements in their local community (in which whites benefit systematically at the expense of people of color) and are yet simultaneously socially acceptable. This "talking the talk but not walking the walk" is evident in many of the Wheaton Hill families that I studied. This phenomenon of justified avoidance matters in terms of how parents' construct their child's racial context. And, through interacting within this context, children in Wheaton Hills produced particular ideas about race that differ from children in Evergreen, despite the parents in both places deploying similar narratives about race.

Further, Wheaton Hills parents who I interviewed vehemently claim that they value "diversity" and want their children to "learn about diverse cultures and people." At times, the way that parents use this term "diversity" maps onto research about "diversity discourse" or "happy talk" in which the term "diversity" is a euphemism for race and allows whites to talk comfortably about race without talking about oppression (Anderson 1999). Other scholars refer

to a similar concept of "shallow multiculturalism," which is celebrating multiculturalism in terms of food, language, and customs, etc. while not addressing the reality of power, privilege, or structural inequality (Bell and Hartmann 2007).

These concepts of "diversity discourse" and "shallow multiculturalism" are connected to the theory of racial apathy in which whites provide "passive support for an unequal racial status quo" (Forman 2004, 59). Racial apathy is an "indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and lack of engagement with race-related social issues" (Forman 2004, 44; See also Forman and Lewis 2006). Like diversity discourse or shallow multiculturalism, racial apathy is centered on whites ignoring racial inequality and behaving in ways that passively reproduce racial inequality while at the same time, allow whites to appear in socially acceptable ways, specifically, without racial prejudice. And while the Wheaton Hills family in my study certainly engage in the passive forms of behavior associated with racial apathy, they do not necessarily express the type of indifference toward inequality or race-related social issues present in the theory of racial apathy, at least not in terms of what they frequently tell their children. Rather, many of these parents talk openly with their children about oppression.

However, I also find that beneath the surface, many of these parents hold negative views of poor blacks as a social group, specifically—ideas that are constantly masked and justified. Because of the ethnographic nature of this study, I was able to address some of the challenges faced by survey research. As Bonilla-Silva (2006) discusses, "surveys on racial attitudes have become like multiple-choice exams in which respondents work hard to choose the 'right' answers (ie., those that fit public norms.)" Because I spent so much time with families in Wheaton Hills, I was able to move beyond accessing simply the 'right' answers and instead, figure out what these parents actually believe to be true. And, given my observations and

findings, it seems that a conundrum exists: while Wheaton Hills parents genuinely believe in the color-conscious things they say about structural inequality, they *also* hold some deeply negative views about specifically *blacks living in poverty*. And, because of these views, many parents here actively work to avoid having their children come into contact with this segment of the population—and again, it is very specifically poor black children. However, because of their desire to not seem racist, as well as their own internalized guilt about feeling the way they do about poor blacks, these parents "mask their views by drawing on some other motive"—a behavior of strategic avoidance that Dovidio and his colleagues (2000, 2001) found college students doing in laboratory settings as part of Dovidio's research on aversive racism.

As a result of these color-conscious parents' participation in justified avoidance, their children spend very little time interacting with specifically *impoverished or working class* people of color, and specifically, impoverished or working class *black children*. As a result, I find that children growing up in the racial context of Wheaton Hills are presented with *propositional knowledge* (that which can be evaluated by reason such as "the criminal justice system treats people of color negatively") and *tacit knowledge* (commonsense knowledge that includes the recognition of white normativity) through the interactions they have with white adults in their lives as well as other white children growing up in the same context (Perry and Shotwell 2007). For instance, many Wheaton Hills children know about and can talk about, at least in the abstract, their privilege, the existence of contemporary racism, the history of race in America, and the nature of contemporary inequality. However, the choices these parents make about other aspects of their child's life, such as school choice, neighborhood choice, extracurricular choices, etc., do not facilitate the development of *affective knowledge* about race in their children, especially given that the children are rarely in environments in which they can interact with

people of color. Affective knowledge that is developed is centered around what is understood to be "the good diversity" in Petersfield—the international community.

These findings lie in contrast to findings about families in Evergreen who seek to provide their children with all three of these types of knowledge, the types of knowledge necessary for the cultivation of anti-racist praxis, as Perry and Shotwell (2007) argue. The result is that Wheaton Hills children can talk fluently about structural racism in America but they lack a sense of empathy or real commitment to both reactive and everyday social action. In other words, Wheaton Hills kids do not offer "a felt recognition of the wrongs of racism" and do not have "close relationships with people of color" and do not witness first-hand "race-based social suffering" the way that some Evergreen children do (Perry and Shotwell 2007). Interestingly however, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Wheaton Hills children also do not develop negative racial stereotypes the way that some of the children attending integrated schools in Evergreen do. Thus, these findings are also explained by drawing on social psychological literature that suggests a particular set of conditions must be in place for cross-racial contact to result in positive outcomes (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1997, Forman 2004).

CHAPTER 9: The Hayes Family—Academic Achievement and Justified Avoidance

Located across the city from Evergreen, the Hayes family lives in the neighborhood community of Wheaton Hills. The two main streets that border Wheaton Hills are popular areas in the city for shopping and eating. Expensive restaurants, fashion boutiques, salons, upscale coffee and wine bars, and expensive grocery stores are located here. While the car traffic is heavy along these two streets, little red flags sit in buckets at the cross walks, ready for college student babysitters to wave as they cross the road with kids. A small lake with a large public park is also located near Wheaton Hills, which is where many children socialize, play soccer, use the jungle gym, learn how to sail, and have school picnics.

Groggy teenagers slowly walk with giant backpacks from their houses to the nearby high school in the early morning while middle-aged women run with baby jogger strollers and big dogs down the sidewalks. An assortment of home maintenance trucks is often parked on the street. While there is a lot of traffic in this neighborhood, it is mostly kids getting dropped off at piano lessons or at friend's houses, moms talking on the sidewalk after picking their kids up at the bus stop, or groups of teenagers playing an intense game of basketball in someone's driveway. Everyone knows each other here.

While the neighborhood is certainly affluent, it is by no means ostentatious. The homes in Wheaton Hills vary quite significantly in size and style. Some homes are old historic brick Colonials while others are small Ranches or Capes that have had numerous additions built on to them over the years. The occasional Deck house is intermingled as well. The average home price in this neighborhood is $400,000. Most of the homes in this neighborhood show clear evidence of children living within them. Basketball hoops exist on almost every driveway, chalk drawings paint the driveways, toys and bicycles and sports equipment litter the lawns and backyards of the

families who live here. Groups of neighborhood children can often be seen after school playing street hockey, soccer, or hide and seek. In the summer months, children run through sprinklers, play on swing sets, and walk to the nearby parks in groups or ride their bikes to the nearby gas station to buy candy or soda with their allowance money.

People that I interviewed who live here describe this neighborhood as, "the perfect place to live," "a great place to raise a family," and "the most ideal neighborhood politically and geographically to live in." People who live across town in Evergreen (Part II) tend to associate this neighborhood with "more middle of the road Democrats" and "the medical and hard sciences professors and their families" and "a little too uptight for me" and even "hypocritical liberals" while Sheridan families (Part I) consider all Petersfield families, regardless of where they live in the city, to be "union thugs" or "naive academics" or "bleeding heart liberals." Clearly, political identity matters a great deal in Wheaton Hills, and members of this community think of themselves as being liberal, but not as liberal as Evergreen or other parts of the city.

Wheaton Hills' families are also commonly known for being—and think of themselves as being—extremely focused on academic achievement. Wheaton Hills is zoned in the school district with the perceived "best" high school in town. The neighborhood is also within close proximity to the multitude of private schooling options in Petersfield. As a result, many families with children live here, particularly professional families with big careers who want school options that work for their schedules and an educational environment that corresponds with their own values and priorities. My data reflect this common priority of academic excellence and achievement amongst affluent, white Wheaton Hills families, particularly families like the Hayes.

The Hayes' home is a four-bedroom white colonial with black shutters and a red front door. Unlike many of the other families on the block, the front yard of the Hayes home is free from children's toys. The bushes are always trimmed perfectly by Mr. Hayes during the summer, the yard is leaf-less in the fall, and there are never any snowmen or even footprints in the blanket of snow covering the front lawn in the winter. In the spring, Mrs. Hayes carefully nurtures the flowers in the window boxes, and their grass is a rich green color from systematic watering and other treatments. The Hayes always park their two cars in their garage, yet the children rarely play in the open driveway like other kids on the block do at their houses.

Rather, 11-year old Aaron and 8-year old Alice, are calm and quiet kids, rarely interested in sports or going outside altogether. Aaron and Alice would much rather snuggle under a blanket and read their Kindles all afternoon, and they do this, on occasion. Mrs. Hayes sometimes forces the two kids outside to play as otherwise they would sit inside reading or playing on the computer for hours on end. Given the kids' personalities, as well as because Mr. Hayes has a home office from which he works, the house is strikingly quiet inside. Mrs. Hayes, a self-assured and blunt woman with light brown curly hair, is enrolled in a Ph.D. program in the humanities at the local university. She is also often studying or writing in her office upstairs in the house. In general, the family members all have an appreciation for homework, high academic performances, quiet time, and reading. The objective of Mr. and Mrs. Hayes as well as the kids is for Aaron and Alice to gain admission to Harvard or Yale, a family commitment and goal they all share and about which they speak openly and regularly.

While many families in Wheaton Hills are constantly running from activity to activity, the Hayes live a more simplistic life when it comes to extracurriculars and socializing. The children spend most of their spare time working on homework or school projects, practicing their

instruments in the basement, or reading in their rooms. The children do not belong to sports teams or boy/girl scouts or other organized groups, although Aaron stays after school twice a week to participate in the Robotics team at his private Gifted and Talented school lead by a parent who is an engineer. The Hayes family eats dinner together each evening with soft classical music playing in the background, and the parents are heavily involved in the academic lives of Aaron and Alice. The children's daily lives are perfectly structured and consistent week in and week out. The family does not travel often, though during the summer, the children are enrolled in enrichment day camps at the local university such as a Chemistry camp or Math camp, which they both enjoy immensely.

Overall, the Hayes are a close-knit family that enjoys spending time with one another, though their social ties to others are somewhat limited, and they seem to be quite introverted as a group, though certainly not shy. The Hayes are all very opinionated and willing to express those opinions if asked. So too are these parents willing to fight for their children and in particular, fight for their children's education when they believe it is threatened. This is especially true for Mr. and Mrs. Hayes as they understand their children to be exceptionally intelligent, having brought the children to testing locations across the area in order to have them designated as "gifted and talented." As such, they approach much of their parenting choices from the vantage point that their kids are exceptional when it comes to their intellectual gifts and academic abilities.

Parents' Backgrounds

Mr. Hayes grew up in Ohio and Mrs. Hayes in New York. Both parents describe the people from their hometowns as predominantly white, affluent, and highly educated. I ask them if they remember talking to their parents about race. Mr. Hayes tells me:

> No. You know, we really, it didn't really come up in conversation, you know. Most of the intense conversations I remember about from my childhood had to do with a lot of Vietnam War talk, but, really, nothing about race specifically. I was too young to talk about assassinations, for instance.

Mrs. Hayes tells me that she feels her childhood was different than that of her husbands:

> My dad worked at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission when I was growing up, so I probably did, you know, we probably had lots of conversations about, you know, I can't remember one in particular but I'm sure that there was this attitude of, you know, equality around the house. It certainly fit with the neighborhood we lived in. It was a place with white people who cared about diversity. When I was in sixth grade…I had some class project I had to do, and my project was to go door to door raising money for sickle cell anemia...and so I bet it must have come through dad somehow, it must, I mean, like, you know, I had to do this thing.

Though Mrs. Hayes cannot cite a particular story or memory about her father engaging in discussions about race and never actually uses the word "race" or "racism," she believes that they talked about "it" in her childhood given her dad's interests and occupation, as well as due to where she lived, "a place with white people who cared about diversity." Given her discussion of sickle cell anemia, it appears that her use of the word "diversity" and "equality" are euphemisms standing in for openly discussing race and in particular, black individuals and families. Of importance here is that Mrs. Hayes, when asked directly, avoids talking about race or racism explicitly. Rather, she skirts my question to some extent, ultimately talking about "diversity" rather than racism or race, a component of what Anderson (1999) and Bell and Hartmann (2003) refers to as "diversity discourse." Rather than talking openly about race and racial inequality, these topics become "structural elephants" in the room:

> Racial inequalities, not to mention racism itself, are big structural elephants. This creates a real, albeit seemingly comfortable, tension in the diversity discourse: people have the ability to explicitly talk about race without ever acknowledging the unequal realities and experiences of racial differences in American society—a phenomenon Andersen (1999) calls "diversity without oppression" (Bell and Hartmann, 2003: 905).

Many families living in Wheaton Hills participate in diversity discourse, or "shallow multiculturalism," referring to race in ways that at times seems unrelated to inequality or oppression. And while the Hayes do so as well, as these examples suggest, they also participate

in what I refer to as "justified avoidance," outlined in the coming pages. This concept of

"justified avoidance" and how it relates to the racial context of childhood constructed for the

Hayes children by their parents will be the focus of this chapter.

Choosing a Neighborhood

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hayes attended college in Petersfield. They met at the university in

town, left Petersfield for a few years, and then ultimately returned to raise their family in the

Petersfield community. Overall then, they have lived in Petersfield for approximately 30 years or

so. While they have spent much of their lives in this community, they have not always lived in

Wheaton Hills. Prior to living in Wheaton Hills, they lived in Evergreen. I ask them why they

left Evergreen for Wheaton Hills. Immediately, the issue of schools comes up. They cite how

"blue collar" parts of Evergreen are and how they didn't think the schools—elementary, middle,

and high school—were suitable for their children:

> **Mr. Hayes**: Well, it's interesting, because when I first moved here it was, the Evergreen neighborhood was dangerous. It was seedy and run down and full of drug addicts. That area, you know, the really nice area by the lake was largely gentrified and settled by the lesbian and gay community. They're the ones who bought the smaller houses and fixed them up and built onto them. To over-stereotype, they weren't raising as many families, you know, because they were gay, so they were comfortable in the smaller houses, and they bought cheap and fixed it up and brought the rest of the neighborhood along with it.

Mrs. Hayes interrupts with her own thoughts about the people who live in Evergreen:

> **Mrs. Hayes:** But the schools are much better over here too, again. Because, so, again, [gay families] they don't have the kids, they don't have to worry about what the schools are like, because they're not bringing kids into the equation. So I think that there's no doubt that Wheaton Hill has a better reputation than Evergreen High…I see it too as a, you know, we do live in this neighborhood, and this isn't a really, it's one view of the world, but it's not the only view of the world, and I, if I got down there, I mean I wasn't even sure what I was going to see down there. But my impression of it was that these are people, in some cases, were very different from, coming from very different places than we are. Lots of blue collar people…

Here, Mrs. Hayes indicates that she understands Evergreen and the surrounding neighborhoods

as where the "blue collar" families live as well as the "gay" part of town, assuming that same-sex

families never have children. Drawing on sexual preference and class only, Mrs. Hayes seems to

strategically avoid discussing race in this moment. Her continued silence on this topic is peculiar

given that the racial composition of neighborhoods and schools in these different parts of the city

is *commonly understood* as being different. For instance, Evergreen High school is more racially

integrated than Wheaton Hills High School, in particular in terms of the population size of white

students versus black students in these two high schools:

	Wheaton Hills	Evergreen
White	60	42.7
Black	10	26.8
Asian	10	10.5
Latino	14	14.5
Native American	1	0
More than 1 race	5	5.5

Table 4: Racial composition of Wheaton Hills and Evergreen High Schools;

I ask the Hayes if they have any friends or acquaintances in the Evergreen community any

longer. They reply that they do not and that really, they have very little contact with that side of

town. Mrs. Hayes mentions that in addition to the gays and the working class, many graduate

students in her Ph.D. program like living over there. "But they are like hipsters (laughing) who

want to be near lots of action and bars and cafes and things that people with families don't care

about. What we care about are the schools." Ironically, Mrs. Hayes seems to momentarily ignore

the immense pockets of wealth in Evergreen, as well as in Apple Hills, which is close to

Evergreen (referenced earlier.)

Overall, the Hayes tell me that they have decided to live in Wheaton Hills because of the

public schools in this part of the city. What makes the schools in Wheaton Hills distinct from

those in Evergreen, then, from the perspective of parents like the Hayes, especially if the racial

makeup of the schools is ignored, at least on the surface?

School choices for Mr. and Mrs. Hayes are complicated by the fact that their children are

both designated as "talented and gifted" (TAG). As such, they feel that it is crucial for them to

find educational opportunities for their kids that allow Alice and Aaron to be challenged

academically. While the discussion about the politics of TAG and the experiences of TAG

students in Petersfield public schools may appear to be a separate and distinct conversation from

the discussion of how parents like the Hayes believe race matters (or doesn't) in the public

schools, ultimately these two debates are more closely interrelated than one might imagine at

first glance.

However, before discussing TAG, I back up and ask the Hayes about their thoughts of

Petersfield schools in general. This is important given that the Hayes sought out the

neighborhood of Wheaton Hills prior to knowing that their children would be designated as

gifted. Without prompting, the first thing Mr. Hayes tells me involves race and class:

> **Mr. Hayes:** Well, I think that the school district has trouble, because they have everything. They have people on the low end of socioeconomic status. They have people coming in from nearby suburbs. They've got everything. They've got white suburban, and they've got inner city, and, you know, most, I think, most other town school districts are much more one or the other. And it's really hard, and, you know, the shrinking pot of resources. I just, I don't think they have a handle on it yet. They've done some really interesting things with school pairings, and they're trying. I just don't think that they have it.

Mrs. Hayes jumps in. "Wheaton Hills is sort of the traditional, good, traditional high school in

the city." When I ask her what she means by "traditional," she tells me, "Oh I don't know, your

typical middle class, normal kind of school." Again, she avoids talking about race, though her

husband does use the word "white" when describing the suburban demographics. Mrs. Hayes

continues by describing her perspective on the elementary school pairings in Wheaton Hills. In

order to make sense of her following comments, some background contextual information is necessary.

Elementary School "Pairings" in Wheaton Hills

While Wheaton Hills children are all slotted to attend the perceived best high school in town, Wheaton Hills High, elementary school choice in Wheaton Hills is a complicated and contentious issue as the boundaries between elementary schools cut in multiple directions through this large neighborhood. One half of this neighborhood is assigned to attend one elementary school (A1), which is paired with another elementary school (A2), while the other half is assigned to attend another elementary school (B1), which is paired with yet another elementary school (B2). Thus, two elementary school pairing exist, the rationale behind this system being that the superintendent at the time was as one mother puts it, "striving for race diversity in the classroom."

While the actual demographic data on these schools will be presented below, I first want to present the commonsense understandings of the racial compositions of these schools by the people who live in Wheaton Hills. The first pairing, which I will call Pairing A, is perceived to combine children who live in an international graduate student housing area (only) with children from some of the most affluent, white blocks in Wheaton Hills. Many of the students of color in Pairing A, thus, are understood to be children of graduate students, most of whom are international students from China and Korea, as told to me by white parents. Pairing B, on the other hand, pulls together children from the "other side of town," most of whom are living in poverty and are Black, with another part of the Wheaton Hills neighborhood, which includes both very affluent white families as well as a handful of more solidly middle class families. Pairing B is assumed to have a very small Asian population. Across both of these schools, there

is little discussion of the Latino population. All of these kids attend the same high school, but the middle and elementary years are distinct from each other in ways that are highly racialized in terms of how people think about these schools. This local racial commonsense knowledge leads to the emergence of a range of private elementary school choices in this neighborhood, with a return to public schools in high school. And, this elementary school choice is based on not only racialized, commonsense understandings of the racial makeup of these different schools but also inaccurate ones. In terms of actual data, these are the demographics for each:

	Pairing A (1-3)	Pairing A (4-6)	Pairing B (1-3)	Pairing B (4-6)
White	69	68	30	31
Black	5	8	13	16
Latino	9	9	39	35
Asian	9	8	13	14
More than 1 race	8	6	5	4

Table 5: Racial composition of elementary school pairings

Interestingly, the data show that the largest difference in racial composition is actually the number of Latino students enrolled in Pairing B as well as the number of white students. Despite this demographic reality, the perception on the behalf of the parents I interviewed, particularly those who had opted out of these schools, was that Pairing B had a large black population, which they indicated through racially-coded terms—like making reference to Hampton Court, a community that is in fact predominantly-black—was a strong rationale for not sending their children there. This also demonstrates that parents like the Hayes who believe they know what is going on at Pairing B lack an accurate sense of the demographics. Rather, for reasons tied to locally understandings about race and knowledge about demographic shifts, the Hayes and many

other families here assume that the minority population in these schools in largely black. This trend in my data with families living in Wheaton Hills reflects a deep disconnect for many parents—particularly those who have opted out of public elementary school—of what the demographic reality is at the school literally right down the street from them.

Mrs. Hayes, who lives in the area designated to attend the Pairing B elementary school—the one many affluent whites find to be unappealing—offers her thoughts on why and how she and her husband made the choice early on to "go private":

> When it comes to elementary schools, with Pairing B, the one we are technically part of, you've got white middle class kids with basically black lower class, working class kids. Compared to Pairing A where you've got more Asian families paired with lots of rich white kids, the University professor kids mainly, which is a much more comfortable pairing. It's just sort of just not as comfortable. These communities (in Pairing B) aren't just as comfortable with each other, you know? So anyway, but, and, I mean, you know, I remember [being] at some kid's birthday party, talking to the parents and they, you know, from preschool, talking about oh, so where are your kids going to, you know, which school district are you in? And this was a teacher, and I said oh we're in Pairing B. "Oh" was her reply. It's just not perceived to be a very good pairing. And it's funny because I remember when we bought this house, Aaron was about four months old…I made some comment to my mom about "oh, yeah, so, you know, I guess it's not in the best elementary school district but, you know, who pays attention to those things anyway?" And she's like, "People pay a lot of money for being in the right school district." And she was right. And that's why we had to send our kids to private school. We weren't in the right school district. Plain and simple.

Her husband, who appears to support and have more sympathy for public schools a bit more than his wife in principle, explains the following to me about his vantage point:

> My assessment of the whole thing is that I went to public schools. Private schools are darn expensive, and, you know, I'm a little disappointed that it didn't work out that way. And I would love for the public schools to have been at a place where my kids could have gone and learned and been enriched there, but I just honestly think that they would have gotten off to a pretty bad start.

Though on the one hand the Hayes tell me that they deliberately selected to live in Wheaton Hills because of the good schools, on the other hand, the very specific scenario in which their children were slotted to attend Pairing B makes them feel like they chose the wrong street to live on,

within the Wheaton Hills neighborhood, or not "the right school district." Mrs. Hayes does not

apologize for their choice to go private, although Mr. Hayes is somewhat more regretful that they

could not have figured out a way to make the public schools work for their children. The Hayes

tell me that in addition to the "behavior problems of the Hampton Court [predominantly black

and low income neighborhood] students" that they had heard about from other parents, their

larger concern was that their child was smarter than the "less opportunity kids." Again, their

connection of black students and the large minority population at Pairing B schools is inaccurate

as well as the notion that the Asian population is drastically different between these schools (see

table above):

> **Mr. Hayes:** The other thing was that Aaron was at a place intelligence-wise where I think going
> to the Pairing B, just because of the opportunities he had and most importantly just because who
> he is on top of that, he was reading at what, a second or third grade level, and he was going into a
> system that because of the lower income, less opportunity kids, there would be a lot of remedial
> ABC kind of stuff, and I think we both believed that, you know, if you want to hook kids on
> education and learning, you have to do it when they're young and we figured he'd be completely
> bored out of his mind [if he went to Pairing B.]

> **Mrs. Hayes:** Yeah, I think it was the right decision. We made a decision for Aaron's education
> based on what we thought he needed, you know, for his ability, what he needed to be getting from
> his school. And what we saw or our understanding of the public schools was that the community
> of students there was going to be such that they wouldn't have the time or the resources to really
> give him what he needed, because they were spending time on, you know, just getting everybody
> the basics for the other kids.

I ask the Hayes if they ever visited the public elementary schools or looked at any school data,

specifically in reference to Pairing B, the school their kids would have attended if they didn't

send them to private school, and the one they perceived as so negative. They tell me that they did

not visit the school but that instead, much of what they know is from talking with other parents:

> **Mrs. Hayes:** I mean, you know, I remember we looked at Pairing B, and I still have the sense, I
> mean, I think I sort of, (laughing sheepishly) I didn't honestly ever physically go to visit Pairing
> B. I looked at Pairing A to consider whether that would be, a lot of people try and get their kids
> transferred there, so I was like well let me go see and see whether I think it's worth it. But, you

> know, I just sort of had the sense that my kids would be bored there too and I don't think we'd even be happy with Pairing A, let alone Pairing B. I mean, all the, you know, everything you sort of pick up from people over time, it's just, they're just, it's not going to get what they want.

Mrs. Hayes seems a little embarrassed to admit to me that she never physically went to Pairing B to assess the situation for herself, but she talks her way out of her embarrassment using the TAG status of her children to make her case as to why they opted out of the public schools. Further, in all of this, while Mrs. Hayes uses racially coded language of "low-income" and "less opportunity" and the name of the subsidized housing community known colloquially as a black neighborhood rather than speaking openly about race. While she briefly mentions the racial aspects of the pairings in her initial description, once she starts talking about her own choices, she seems to preclude race from the equation altogether.

I ask the Hayes very candidly about whether they ever talk to each other about the impact of affluent parents "pulling out of public schools" and opting in to private schools instead on educational inequality more broadly. While Mr. Hayes repeats his disappointment to me that they pulled out, though stands by their decision, Mrs. Hayes tells me:

> We have. But, our kids just aren't going to get the kind of education that we know they can handle and that they need to meet those goals, those goal that we want for their lives. I know some students who study educational disparities and I remember having a conversation with one of them about this sort of thing, and she said to me, "You're just the kind of parent we need in public schools." And my reaction was, "Yeah, but I'm not doing this for the public schools. That may be true, but I'm doing this for my kids, and I've got to do what I think is best for my kids, and what, the education they'll get, where they'll get the best education for what they need. And given everything I see about my kids is they need more than what the public schools are going to give.

As she speaks, Mr. Hayes sits upright and on the edge of his seat, waiting for his wife to finish speaking so he can interject and express his thoughts that have just come to mind. Clearly I struck some sort of nerve by this line of questioning and this topic is one that brings about emotions—and a bit of defensiveness—in the Hayes:

Mr. Hayes: I don't know if you've heard about the big controversy going on at Wheaton Hills about how the school has not been in compliance with the TAG guidelines and what's been going on there. Well, a lot of the opposition to that is because of this whole achievement gap thing (rolling his eyes) and they think that, people think that tracking is going to abandon people on the lower end, basically, minorities, which I think is appalling, because it implies that there's no such thing as a gifted minority student, and that's not true.

Like the politics of the elementary school pairing situation, parents in the Wheaton Hills neighborhood are also in the midst of a massive debate about the large racial achievement gap at Wheaton Hills High School. More than half of the black students in the Petersfield district do not graduate from high school whereas almost all of the white students graduate and go on to extremely prestigious and competitive institutions. The district, in fact, brags on its website about how many Merit Scholars and other national awards students win at their schools, even within a context of massive achievement differences along racial lines. As one race scholar who lives in the community put it in a local newspaper column, "If we have 'a good school system,' we must always ask: good for whom?...We're not doing a great job serving all kids. If I'm white and middle class, I can get a fine education in [the] public schools. But it's not the same for black students." The racial achievement gap is an issue of concern by not only the local community (though, mostly members of the black and Latino community from my observations) and administrators, but also at the level of state government.

In the context of this discussion about the racial achievement gap emerges a different discussion about whether or not Wheaton Hills High School is complying with TAG guidelines. Specifically, are enough AP and Honors level courses being offered to the TAG students? And while the legal case was resolved at the time of my data collection (with the TAG parents winning), the memory of this case was fresh in the minds of the people I interviewed, particularly those who were somehow loosely or directly involved in the lawsuit given their child's TAG designation. And, according to these parents, they felt like the district was more

concerned about the first issue, the achievement gap, than the TAG incompliance and that in fact, unequal resources were being distributed to these two different though related school debates.

Parents like the Hayes explain to me that even though Aaron was only in early middle school during this battle—and attending a private TAG school in town with other children who have been identified as being gifted—because no comparable TAG high school exists in the community, they intend to send Aaron to Wheaton Hills High School despite their use of private schooling up until high school. They are upset because they believe that the high school's somewhat limited resources are being unfairly spent on programs aimed at reducing the racial achievement gap while TAG programming gets "left by the wayside." In their words, the school officials are "only trying to bring up the bottom," rather than offer specific "honors" classes in 9th and 10th grade, which the Hayes believe the school is legally required to offer to their TAG identified children. Because their kids attend the TAG elementary/middle school, they can take high school courses for "9th grade credit" while in 8th grade, thereby putting them at an advanced standing before they even walk into the high school on the first day of school.

Subsequently, parents like the Hayes argue that the school ought to provide advanced courses for their children in 9th grade, in particular—a time where not as many students enroll in AP courses as, for instance, in 11th or 12th grade. Mr. Hayes in particular, draws on race in his argument. He tells me that he thinks it is appalling to take resources away from TAG, which is what he perceives is happening, because "it implies that there's no such thing as a gifted minority student, and that's not true. We want diversity in the TAG classroom!," using the word "diversity" to stand in for "racial diversity." When I ask him about racial demographics of who is in the TAG program at Wheaton Hills High School, he tells me with some agitation, "There may not be a lot of minority TAG students but that's a problem that starts much earlier in elementary

school. Not in high school." Again, he continues by reiterating how much he wants TAG

programming to be both strong and "diverse." As mentioned, the Hayes children attend a private

elementary/middle school that costs the Hayes a great deal of money each year, an option that

would be difficult for many of the black families in Petersfield. Currently, 20% of the TAG

school's racial composition includes "students of color." Specific data on this private school was

unavailable, even after personal inquiry. Parents told me very few black students attend this

school. The students of color, they tell me, are "from all over the world."

The Hayes are also frustrated because they feel that the school is attempting to expand

the TAG program in ways that no longer isolate their child the way he needs to be isolated—as

truly gifted and talented:

> **Mrs. Hayes:** They've also decided that kids can be gifted in one of like five different areas or something. I didn't read in detail the whole plan, but the idea was that they were going to assess kids with an eye towards finding particular talents, you know, leadership. It wasn't just academic. It wasn't—it was like the arts and leadership and things like that, which are not really what TAG is supposed to be about. It is supposed to be about intelligence. Also, all of sudden, they are like, "We're going to assess the kids and see who fits into this new gifted category." I'm like, "Don't you already do that? I mean, I must be missing something. Isn't that your job? To assess student's abilities?" (speaks angrily). I'm like we must have gotten spoiled with the private schools we have attended where it's like the teachers are actually paying attention to my kids— they know my kids, and they know their strengths and weaknesses and help them work through whatever troubles they have. Don't they do this at public schools? I mean, my sense is that they just, you know, one teacher has them for a year and just nothing happens. There's no carryover to the next year, and everybody starts over every year.

The Hayes appear to feel threatened by changes to the TAG program based on what they say and

how they say it. They want their child to have the best education because their child is

exceptional. They are angry and frustrated with the public schools, especially it seems with the

teachers in elementary school. Yet, their children never attended public elementary school. They

are also very dismissive of "arts and leadership" as alternative ways in which children are gifted.

Again, ironically, the Hayes seem to suggest that some sort of subjectivity is implicated in the

designation of TAG when it comes to arts and leadership (and coincidentally when it includes

more black and Latino children into the mix) whereas when it comes to more traditional measures of giftedness, objectivity prevails.

"Early On" and Racial Achievement Gap

Given their passionately articulated remarks, I then ask the Hayes what the solution is for resolving the racial achievement gap in their opinion, that certainly the school cannot simply devote zero resources to the "bottom" group of students. I also ask them how they would respond to the argument that separating TAG students apart from other students in 9th and 10th grade, (which is what ultimately happened) would be yet another way in which racial segregation and tracking by race in the school may happen. Mr. Hayes responds by telling me that "if you're going to spend money on education, spend it early. It's worth the money early on to sort of get them going on the right track" and that the school district needs to focus on enhancing elementary schools and developing 4-year old Kindergarten programs rather than trying to "fix the problem once it is too late" to do so at the high school level.

The Hayes also cite that teachers need to do a better job identifying who is gifted—that certainly "minority" students aren't being identified as such. Yet, despite their passion and enthusiasm for "diversity" in the TAG classroom, they do not engage in productive ways to advocate for this objective. Rather, from their perspective, schools ought to figure out who is gifted early on and also figure out the solution to the racial achievement gap early on. Ironically, "early on" in the Hayes children's lives, they were not even in public schools but the private TAG school:

> **Mr. Hayes:** You know, when all of this was heating up, and, yes, it was some group of TAG parents that filed a formal complaint. A friend of ours, a family that we're friends with…enlisted me to try and help be sort of a vocal center. But ultimately, I think that all this energy and emotion that's being expended on trying to get Wheaton High up to compliance, I think would've been better spent on, you know, if they would find out what's going on in first graders' heads, early on.

> **Mrs. Hayes:** I think that is right, that early on . . . because you've got to, I mean, I can't use the word 'track,' but you want to get kids off on the right foot.

Mrs. Hayes is aware that the word "tracking" has negative connotations often associated with it—particularly around racial tracking in schools. She is aware of this and tries to again skirt the issue. In addition, the lack of black and Latino children in TAG classrooms is a problem that "they" (i.e. other people) need to fix—not the Hayes. While these parents are incredibly engaged in the academic lives of their children, volunteering countless hours to school activities, assignments and organizing, the question of "diversity" in TAG environments is the problem of other people, not them, and not only teachers but parents of children of color: "*I* advocate for *my* child because that is the job of a mother," Mrs. Hayes tells me passionately. While somewhat subtle perhaps, here, Mrs. Hayes appears to be accusing other people's mothers (i.e. mothers of black children) of not doing their job in advocating for their child, drawing on a popular white trope of the "dysfunctional" or "pathological" black family.[11] As Roberts writes, "images of black maternal unfitness have been around so long that many Americans don't even notice them. They are reincarnated so persistently and disseminated so thoroughly that they become part of the unconscious psyche, part of the assumed meaning of blackness" (65).

The debate around TAG programing has close ties to somewhat similar debates around the process of "racial tracking" in high schools across the country, even as Mrs. Hayes tries to avoid this topic. Should students who have been designated as "advanced," often through

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[11] The Moynihan Report was published in 1965 by the secretary of labor, Daniel P. Moynihan. This report "contained the thesis that weaknesses in the black family are at the heart of the deterioration of the black community" (Johnson and Staples 2005, pg. 46). Moynihan and his team reported that high rates of "dissolved" or unstable marriages, "illegitimate" children, and female-headed households in the black community were the cause of "the failure of youth" measured in terms of black children's school performance, work ethic, IQ scores, and delinquency rates. Moynihan and his team claimed that "the tangle of pathology [was] tightening" in the Black community and that social policy was necessary to "bring the Negro American to full and equal sharing in responsibilities and rewards of citizenship" (Moynihan Report, Chapters II, IV). Overall, as Jewell (2003) writes, "perceptions of African American families as structurally and functionally dysfunctional have been at the basis of both conservative and liberal social policy" (Jewell 12).

processes that have been cited as highly susceptible to subjective racial bias, receive more school resources than those who are not "advanced"? And how does subjective racial bias work in terms of TAG students? For instance, Carman (2011) finds that white kids with glasses more likely to be presumed to be gifted than black kids. In a similar study, Barber and Torney-Purta (2008) found that "high-achieving English students were more likely to be nominated by teachers for advanced work in the subject if they had high intrinsic motivation to read, if they were female, and if they were not black" (412). Similarly, Manno and Lewis (2011) discuss the ways in which racial bias operates in those responsible for determining who has behavioral problems, or "soft" special education designations, often drawing on subjective racial bias when making decisions—decisions that not only put minority students in lower tracks or designate them as having behavioral problems but decisions that also put white students in higher tracks or designate them as gifted and talented.

Overall, the Hayes are very invested in getting the best possible education for their children and are willing to fight, even through legal avenues, to get what they believe their children deserve because their children are exceptional. As the Hayes put it, "Aaron was bored in Kindergarten. He already knew his ABCs. So we had to provide him with more."

Political Vantage Point of Hayes

The Hayes identify as socially liberal. We discuss a range of policy issues and social problems over our time together, and generally, from my assessment, the Hayes understand the concept of structural racism and believe that it exists. For instance, Mr. Hayes tells me that "racism operates at the institutional level" and passionately rants to me about the need "to develop policies and programs that addresses racial inequality in health outcomes. Similarly, one afternoon after school, Mrs. Hayes poses the question, "I mean, you know, Affirmative Action is

great, but what about Affirmative Action in elementary school?" and continues to explain her

theory of how elementary schools ought to adopt policies like this that serve to channel students

of color into better resourced and integrated schools. Ironically, in some ways, the pairing project

of elementary schools in Petersfield exemplify her policy suggestion. The Hayes also discuss the

criminal justice system, though their perspectives of the racial inequality within this system

seems to weave between cultural arguments and structural ones:

> **Mrs. Hayes:** You can't just build more prisons, and you can't just not arrest people for doing wrong things, but you have to deal with the problem earlier on.
>
> **Mr. Hayes:** Why are black kids getting in trouble?
>
> **Mrs. Hayes:** Why are kids getting in trouble? They're bored. They're not being challenged.
>
> **Mr. Hayes:** Well, I think, you know, that there's no real opportunity in this country anymore for people, if they're not going to college. If you're not bound for college, school has absolutely no context.
>
> **Mrs. Hayes:** And that's why they're bored, because they're . . .
>
> **Mr. Hayes:** And there's no unskilled middle class labor anymore. That's all in other countries. So it's all low pay service industry stuff, and I think it's, there's no context. There's no meaning. There's some hopelessness. There's, I don't want to get off on that whole family values thing, because that's not what I'm about. But single parent households, not as much supervision. All these things. They're bored. Exposure. You know, what are our kids exposed to on the street corner? … But it's just, you know, it's not one single thing. It's a lot of cultural things. I don't know. There's no easy fix on that.
>
> **Mrs. Hayes:** Oh, and I think, to some extent, black kids are committing the crimes that are being prosecuted, are the focus of efforts to stop crime. Right? They're being picked up for the things that the police look for. I mean, I don't know. I mean, you know, our kids aren't perfect, but they're not doing things that the police are out to get them for. I think, so I think there's some of that.
>
> **Mr. Hayes:** There's some truth to that. You know, if the police were really out to stop underage drinking, you know, you could catch a lot of white kids up in the park on this street. But, you know, that's not what the crime efforts are focused on. Again, another factor in this is the whole war on drugs and the militarization of police work.

Mentioning the War on Drugs, the militarization of the police, racial bias in policing

neighborhoods, the racialized surveillance of teenage behaviors, the labor market, limited

opportunities for all kids to attend college in the future, and globalization, the Hayes draw upon

broad, institutional level policy and practices that they believe contribute to the reproduction of racial inequality. However, even as Mr. Hayes qualifies his statements about "family values," he nonetheless brings up single-headed households, a "lack of supervision" of presumably black children, and alludes to further cultural arguments about the "dysfunction" of the black family. Interestingly thus, he weaves together structural arguments and cultural arguments, inserting into the conversation both his political correctness alongside his actual perspectives. This is evidenced when, after a long discussion about racial inequality and the need for social change, the Hayes tell me that when it comes to their own child, they will do whatever it takes to secure the most resources they can, even if this comes at a cost for "kids at the bottom" or "low opportunity kids" or kids whose mothers don't advocate for them. This blend of what the Hayes know are socially acceptable and "academic" arguments with more common cultural ones reflects their desire to be thoughtful and compassionate people while at the same time, working to advance the interests of their own child, even at the expense of other people's children. [Could link to racial apathy and aversive racism here—or just wait and do it at the end.] And, these discussions—and they do not just happen while I am there, I am told—are heard and interpreted by Aaron.

Aaron hears his parents' perspectives, he knows that there are a lot of high school students who think that the TAG parents and students who filed this complaint were out of line in doing so (although by the time he reaches Wheaton High, this controversy is somewhat put to rest as the honors classes were added and the students who protested the changes on the grounds that they were "racist" a few years prior had mostly graduated by then.) Nevertheless, part of the racial context of childhood that the Hayes parents have constructed, includes situating their children within a community (through school and neighborhood choice but also in terms of types

of interactions they have with Aaron and Alice) in the midst of a heated controversy that in some ways, though perhaps unintentionally, pits the academically struggling black kids against the gifted white kids, who also happen to be affluent and educated in private schools prior to high school. And while this context is color-conscious and people living within it, like Mrs. Hayes, openly reject "colorblindness", and thinking about black children and families commitments to working for racial equality are few and far between. Whether this is a form of laissez-faire racism ("let it be", not my problem), aversive racism (expressing dislike in settings where they can get away with it, otherwise being politically correct), or racial apathy (not caring) is unclear. However, what is clear in my data is that rather than building connections and relationships with members of the black community and rather than thinking much about the local struggles of the black community, whites like the Hayes can justify their avoidance of the black community because of the TAG designation of their child—even if they are not entirely passive insofar as how they vote, for example.

Construction of a Racial Context

Aaron hears the conversations about the politics of the elementary school pairings and why Pairing B is bad, and he has discussions with his parents about the racial wealth gap, for instance. His interactions, both with his parents as well as with the teachers and other students at his private school, are made possible only because of the parenting choices made by Mr. and Mrs. Hayes to live here, engage in the way they do, and say the things they say. Ironically, these everyday conversations between his parents and the racially-informed choices they make (such as not wanting to send their kids to Pairing B without much investigation into the school climate and academic outcomes, etc.) coexist with their political discussions about race in America and the need for social change.

Conversations about race: Responding to curiosity

My research demonstrates that the Hayes talk very openly with their kids about race in focused ways: they tell me, and I observe, that they usually talk about race within politics and as connected to wealth inequality—these topics are of interest to Mr. Hayes in particular, so the family often discusses them. However, these conversations are put in terms outside of the local context and are very abstract. For instance, Mr. Hayes tells me about the discussions they had at the time of Obama's first election:

> We had a lot of discussion about race in particular during the 2008 campaign too with Obama, and since then with some of the people who insist that he's, you know, they've come up with reasons to delegitimize him as an American or as a Christian or whatever, which I find fascinating. It's like, you know, I just think there's a certain group of people in this country who just can't deal with a black guy as President, so there was a lot of talk about why this was so significant. The kids, you know, they come from a different era. They don't have a, they're not as tuned in to why this matters to people our age. You know, there were still lynchings going on in my lifetime. You know, that's hard for me to get my brain around. The kids don't really have that knowledge and they are curious, so we try to talk about it.

The Hayes talk about race with their children because their children are interested in the topic—and because they are as adults—and because knowledge of current events, including racial politics, is a piece of a child's education, in the view of the Hayes. As Mr. Hayes puts it, "It's all a contributing part of their education." I ask the Hayes if the decision to speak openly about these topics was something they deliberately decided to do as parents early in their children's lives:

> **Mr. Hayes:** Yeah. Well, we, I never, you know, I made up my mind when they were little that I was never going to talk down to them and patronize them as kids. And, you know, if they're interested, we'd keep talking. And if they didn't know what I was talking about, they ask questions.

> **Mrs. Hayes:** I think there's some combination of, like you (indicating to Mr. Hayes) said, the timing of Obama's campaign and presidency with, combined with my, you know, political upbringing, and your ability to articulate. You are very, I can't articulate things very well, but (to me) he is very well read. (To him) You've spent a lot of time, I don't know when you do it, but (to me) he's very up to date on current events and sort of what's going on and can articulate arguments about those events and can explain all of what's going on and either how he feels or how other people, you know, different sides of the argument, whether it's something political going on in D.C…he seems to really be aware of things. So I think that he, in particular, provides a lot of information that the kids can chew on, and because of the timing of the interesting things going on and because of the age and the ability for them to really…

Mr. Hayes (interrupting): Kids pick up on no fair. They pick up on fair versus not fair. We get a lot of questions about that. I was really surprised at how quickly they just got the unfairness of this, you know, union stripping legislation and all that kind of stuff. Even if they didn't understand the complexities of the issues, they understood that it was stacking, you know, and there's a lot of that going on in our culture right now. Politics. We end up talking about those things a lot. You know, I don't know. They're smart kids, and they're very verbal. And knowledge of these things makes them smarter.

I ask Mr. Hayes what he in particular wants his children to pick up from him—what types of ethics does he seek to instill in his children? He responds:

Mr. Hayes: That's funny. I was just talking about this. We switched health insurance at the first of the year, so we're getting used to all new everything. Aaron had his first doctor appointment with his new pediatrician. You know, we were talking about all these things that he'd have to deal with like instant messaging, chat and Internet usage and all that and I said I can't, nor do I want to, watch the guy every second of every day, but what I want to do is tell him, have him, you know, understand enough about right and wrong, both in his personal life but also his political life as a citizen.

Mr. Hayes wants his children to understand what is happening at the level of national and local politics. It is important to him that his children are as highly educated as possible, that they pursue the questions they have about the world around them, and that they prepare themselves to be an informed citizen who asks curious questions of those around them.

After spending time with this family, I certainly observed the kinds of conversations Mr. Hayes refers to here. The local protests were a big point of discussion in the Hayes family and while the children made signs to bring to the protests, they only attended a few times. Instead, they read newspaper articles about the protests and discussed the protests as a family. Overall though, the Hayes do not talk speak explicitly about having specific goals in mind of "raising anti-racist children", for instance, like Evergreen parents. Rather, conversations about race are not avoided, but rather seem to be couched within conversations about politics, current events and history. And, while the purpose of having these kinds of conversations for Evergreen parents is more tied to social justice and the encouragement of activism, for parents like the Hayes, the

primary objective is for their child to be able to talk about politics and current events in sophisticated and informed ways and to cultivate an interest in these topics in their kids.

In terms of my theory of racial socialization, Mr. and Mrs. Hayes construct a color-conscious context that is unique from the families in Evergreen in that it has a focus on the individual exceptionalism of their children. The official designation of having a TAG child, while useful in many ways for getting children like Aaron a great education, excuses the Hayes from being ostracized by their liberal peers who think all affluent whites ought to support their local public schools, like Mrs. Hayes fellow graduate students in her department. The designation also provides the Hayes with a socially acceptable rationale for why their children need more resources than other children at the school. The statement of, "my child needs more," while it may absolutely be true, intersects with broader structures of privilege in which the net result is that children like Aaron who already have a lot, get even more, while other kids, continue to get less. Alongside these statements of Exceptionalism in their children though, is a sort of shallow multiculturalism, which will be developed further in the following chapter.

Overall, based on my interviews with the Hayes as well as my observations of them interacting with their children, I believe that the Hayes maintain a color-conscious racial ideological position (though at times, beneath the surface, insert very negative views about the "culture" of black families) but behave in ways that are consistent with their ideology through the mechanism of justified avoidance. The Hayes do not speak openly about race but rather use diversity discourse, a strategic way of avoiding a topic that is, at some level, uncomfortable for the Hayes. The Hayes also make no deliberate attempts to form relationships with people of color, nor do they value creating racially integrated spaces for their children to learn and socialize. Opting out of not only the public schools but most extracurricular activities, the insular

life lived by their children is void of any contact or interaction with people of color, outside of

the few international students of color at school. Perhaps the best example of their shallow

multiculturalism comes in discussing the racial demographics of students designated as TAG.

Rather than recognizing racial oppression or systematic failure within the TAG system and

processes, they state that they wish there was more diversity. This perspective of "diversity

without oppression" fits squarely within Anderson's (1999) work on diversity discourse.

Anderson cites "happy talk" as one way whites avoid discussions of race and racism, and the

Hayes certainly rely on this, particularly when talking about Pairing A and Pairing B.

This means that while they claim to support affirmative action programs in theory, in

practice, they participate in the pitting against of TAG programs with programs explicitly

designed for addressing the racial achievement gap. On the one hand, the Hayes talk openly

about race with their kids, they believe that race matters in America, they outright reject

colorblind ideology (using the actual term, in fact), and they claim to support policies that

advance racial equity (although in practice this support is questionable). However, they also

articulate negative views of blacks in their local community, they like particular types of

diversity (like their preference for Pairing A that brings together Asian students and whites while

rejecting Pairing B that brings together black students and whites.) They do not want their

children going to school with "low opportunity" or "lower income" kids, and they ultimately

support programs that systematically benefit white students like their own child while in turn put

kids of color in their local community at a further disadvantage. This ideological position, thus,

is unique from the color-conscious position of Evergreen parents as well as the colorblind

position of the parents in Sheridan. Parents like the Hayes, drawing on their various forms of

resources, make choices about where to live, what private schools to attend, what political fights

to fight, what friends they want for their children, etc. that are informed by their perspective of race. Through these choices, the Hayes construct a context of childhood for Aaron and Alice that includes a very specific set of possible interactions with adults and peers. And, as a result of the interactions that Aaron and Alice have in their home, in their neighborhood, at Robotics meetings, at their private TAG school, and with other kids, they interpret and produce knowledge about race.

For example, on the one hand, Aaron receives messages about his local community that are structured around racial groups battling for contested resources, such as the Wheaton High School TAG controversy. On the other hand, he has enormous access to propositional knowledge about race, both from his parents and their conversations as well as from his private TAG school which undeniably offers a more critical perspective on race than in other schools such as Sheridan Middle School. The school he attends is predominantly white, with the few students of color in his class being Asian and Indian, according to him. Consequently, Aaron does not have substantial contact with black and Latino kids. This fact means that he does not form inter-racial friendships with members of these groups, although his best friend is Korean-American, which as will be discussed, is one way in which Aaron forms affective knowledge about race. This fact also means that he has limited unequal-status contact with kids of color like his peers in Evergreen. That is, Aaron is not presented with information that he may perceive in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes, though so too is he not presented with many opportunities to develop affective knowledge about race through forming close, equal-status friendships with people of color.

Given all of these various aspects of Aaron's racial context of childhood—informed specifically by the four dimensions of my theory of a racial context—how does Aaron make

sense of race? What commonsense ideas is he forming as a result of the interactions he has within this particular context constructed for him by his parents, defined by a sense of "shallow multiculturalism?"

Aaron's Perspective on Race and Related Topics

Aaron is a brown haired slender boy with glasses. He is a very hardworking and dedicated student who plays the violin and is on the robotics team at his school. He is somewhat shy, but once he gets talking about something about which he feels passionate, he is very engaged, emotionally expressive, and articulate. Aaron has an excellent grasp of current events as well as history, and he draws on this propositional knowledge frequently when answering questions that I pose to him, citing books he has read and subjects he has learned about at school. Aaron, unlike many of the other kids in my sample, attends a private school that is reserved for talented and gifted students. In order to enter this school, Aaron had to qualify and be designated "gifted" and his parents had to hand over a substantial tuition fee. Aaron enjoys his school, has a small group of close friends, and seems comfortable in an insular and contained school and social environment that challenges him academically. While on an everyday basis, Aaron really only sees a small group of other kids, Aaron has a very impressive knowledge of issues of inequality, and he can make compelling arguments about racial wealth inequality in the United States, among other topics such as gender inequality. Aaron does not watch television as the family does not own one; yet, he uses the Internet frequently for school assignments as well as for his own purposes, such as reading the news or playing computer games. The kids in the Hayes family are not allowed to have social media sites or email accounts, though neither seem particularly upset about this, unlike many other kids in my study who sulked over not being allowed to have Instagram or Twitter accounts until high school.

Aaron describes his educational background to me—he has attended multiple private

schools, not only his current TAG school, he explains to me. This is how he describes the racial

composition of his school:

> **Aaron:** Well, racially, it's quite diverse, actually. There is a, there's not really a black or African American population, but there are quite a few Indian people. Other than that, there's not a lot of racial diversity, but, yeah, mostly.

He tells me that although most of the schools he has attended are predominantly white and

Indian, he thinks there is a benefit to attending a school with more racial groups:

> **Aaron:** I think it is better to have different people, different races there, but I don't think it really affects how like you learn or anything like that. But I do think that it has got to be comfortable learning and that, because some people aren't comfortable around black people. So I think if you are comfortable learning with those people, then that's good. I mean, if you grow up not really being forced but just, in general…learning around other people of other races, then the racism will probably be lower, and you probably won't find people of other races, you know, like scarier, different as much.

Aaron goes on to tell me that he thinks that while some white people "just are cool about stuff"

related to race and racial difference and "don't care," "some people do care and I would think

that those would be people who did not ever have exposure to people of different races." I ask

Aaron about his own experience at school and if he has any friends who are a different race than

he is. He tells me that he does not have any black friends but that his best friend, who very

recently moved away, is Korean. He also tells me that he wishes he had more friends of color: "I

feel like I don't have the chance to meet people who are black but I want to. Maybe when I get to

high school I will." I follow up by asking him why he wants to meet people who are black and he

responds, "I dunno, just cuz. I learn a lot about Korea from my friend, so I think I could learn a

lot about what it is like to be black if I had a black friend."

Aaron and I also talk about racism at his school:

> **Aaron:** Well, most of the people that I've been to school with are pretty nice, and they don't have that quality that would make them think it's justifiable to do that [i.e. be racist]. So I don't know if it's just where I've been, or if it's the norm, or what. But, yeah, I think that's pretty, I don't want to say that like, you know, we're not saying this because we're nicer than everyone

else, and everyone else should do that, but I think that we, there are, I just haven't gone to the people, school with the people that do that, so, yeah.

Here, similar to the children in Sheridan, Aaron tells me that while his school isn't racist and the kids and teachers are nice, maybe this is because the kids have not gone to other schools where people "do that." While he assures me that he doesn't think his school is ethically superior than other schools, he does suggest that there is less racism at his school.

I ask Aaron if he talks about race at school with his teachers. He tells me that while they do not talk a lot about racism and discrimination directly, they frequently discuss racial matters in their social studies class, particularly when they are studying history. He describes in great detail, the history of multicultural America that he has been learning at school, mentioning Howard Zinn as he does. He also tells me that sometimes, when a student has a question about a statistic or factual piece of information, the kids all gather around the teacher's desk while she looks up the answer to the question on the computer. The class, within the private school for gifted and talented students, is based on student inquiry so when students want to examine something in more detail, Aaron tells me that there is time for that. The teacher will change the lesson plan in the middle of class if something more interesting comes up, he tells me. He also states that, "for some reason, a lot of stuff about race and different types of people come up" in those scenarios. I ask him if he can think of any concrete examples of when they looked something up on the computer. He can't recall anything in the moment, but later, as I am leaving his house, perhaps an hour or two after our interview, he approaches me as I say goodbye to his parents and tells me that he remembers an example. I ask him what he remembers. He describes how in class the previous week, someone wanted to know which political party black Americans liked more: the Democrats or the Republicans. Aaron describes the teacher asking the class to gather around her computer as they looked up the answer to the student's question on the

computer, and how this question then lead to a discussion about the Green Party and the Tea

Party. From Aaron's vantage point, this was an interesting discussion because while the teacher

led it, it was a learning process in which all of the members of the class participated.

During the interview, previous to his recollection of the class discussion about race and

political party composition, I ask Aaron if he thinks his experience at the private school is a

different experience than the one he might have if he attended public school. He responds:

> **Aaron:** Yeah. I think, well, in particular, my school puts quite a challenge on the kids. Like they
> really pile them, so I think, definitely, I'm getting more in a shorter amount of time than if I went
> to a public school. But, I'm not sure. From what I've heard, the public school's a lot more loose.
> Like my school is pretty much don't do this, don't do that. But in public schools, I've like never
> been at a public school, so what I would think is that it's a lot looser, like there's a lot less
> restriction. So it's a lot more open, and there's a lot more opportunity for people to do whatever
> they want, which is, again, probably why I haven't seen much of that…And I think my school
> puts quite a challenge on the kids. Like they really pile them, so I think, definitely, I'm getting
> more in a shorter amount of time than if I went to a public school.

Aaron implies, through the use of words like "loose" and "less restriction" a sense that public

schools are a bit more out of control. He thinks the rules at his school are probably more rigid

and also appears to be wary of the behavior of other children in a public school setting. We

continue to talk more about his various school experiences, and during our conversation, Aaron

explains to me that he will not be staying in private school in high school. Rather, he will go to

Wheaton Hills High. I ask him what his thoughts are on this:

> **Aaron:** I think that if I did stay in a private school, I think that I would probably be more
> prepared for college. But the only private school experience that I like remember is what I'm in
> now, and that's, you know, quite the challenge. So I would assume that if it continued like it is,
> then I would be much more prepared.

Aaron believes that if he were able to stay in a private high school throughout his pre-college

years, he would be "much more prepared" for college. He is regretful that there is not a private

TAG school in town that he can attend. Given this line of conversation, I decide to transition into

talking about educational inequality. Specifically, I ask him if he thinks it is fair that he goes to a

private school while other kids go to the public schools—that isn't it a little unfair that he get "quite the challenge" while his peers do not:

> **Aaron:** Well, yeah. A lot of the time, it seems to me like money is a big factor in that. Like if it's, I don't exactly know why this is, but, you know . . . the colored population, like blacks, just, you know, they don't have as high income for some reason, so they don't have as much money to send their kids to better schools. So they just send them to, sometimes, the bare minimum, so it's not really fair. Because everyone should kind of get the same education, but sometimes it's just not possible for that to happen, I think, so.
>
> **Maggie:** Do you have any kind of hunches as to why it is that maybe overall black families don't have as high an income?
>
> **Aaron:** Well, my original hunch would be that employers wouldn't want to hire them as much, because they're a different race. But I know that if there are two people up for a job, and they're equally as capable, then the employer has to choose that will make the community or the business more diverse. So I don't know why that would happen, if they don't try as hard for the job, or if they just don't have jobs in general, so they don't get as much money. But I really don't know.
>
> **Maggie:** What do you think about the employer trying to make the business more diverse?
>
> **Aaron:** I think it's a good thing. It can be a way to try to fix the unequalness.

Bringing up employment discrimination and Affirmative Action, which he ultimately believe is a good policy that works to "fix the unequalness," Aaron recognizes that racism operates at a level much larger than individuals and on a scale much larger than isolated incidents of discrimination. His only mention of race comes in the form of the word "colored," although he switches to using "black" after the one initial use of this term. He does use the word "diversity" which suggests that the diversity discourse found in adults that Anderson (1999) discusses, can also be found in the children, particularly children who are growing up in color-conscious yet predominantly-white spaces. Though I try to push Aaron to talk about whether he thinks it is fair that some kids go to private school, he actively tries to steer my questioning away from that topic and instead changes the discussion into one about income inequality and economic class.

So too does Aaron avoid talking about the controversy about TAG designation and the Wheaton Hills High School controversy. He remains silent on these topics when his parents

bring them up and maneuvers around my questions about them, which is curious given how

passionately and frequently his parents talk about these issues. It appears as if he is actively

avoiding these topics, perhaps knowing that they are controversial and not wanting to talk about

race relations and tensions in his own community.

Aaron is willing to talk about race in America outside of the local debates, however. For

instance, he tells me how he believes that white people have advantages in American society:

> **Aaron:** I think they just kind of have the upside, because a lot of people . . . just have the, they're a little wary of other races, because they find them too different. And since much of society is run by white people anyway, which is an upside, more white people are, you know, accepted into jobs, so they get the upside. So, yeah, I do think they have the upside.
>
> **Maggie:** Can you say more about what you just said? That white people kind of run the country?
>
> **Aaron:** Well, they kind of run society, like, you know, you look at the CEOs of, you know, oil companies, and they're all white men.
>
> **Maggie:** I see. So some people say that, you know, electing Obama as the first black President means our country is past being racist. What do you think about that?
>
> **Aaron:** I definitely don't think that it put us past race. I have heard that though. I just think it showed that people are not stuck in a rut, only electing people like white men, but I don't think this puts us past race, because, you know, I haven't seen like racism disappear. You know, just in general, not like physically watching, but I don't think it's just disappeared; it's still here, so I don't think it has put us past race very much.
>
> **Maggie:** So where do you think it still exists? Can you think of any examples?
>
> **Aaron:** Well, my best friend, who is Korean, just recently moved to Illinois. And he, he's moving to a very white town, and he is really worried about it. I would be too if I were him. I haven't heard from him whether or not, you know, if they're racists or anything. But from what I've heard in general about the area, they're not very accepting of other races. And I think that electing an African American president hasn't changed that, so, yeah, I don't really think that's changed at all. It actually makes me kind of mad, like to know that maybe he will have to go through that.

As a result of this equal-status friendship, Aaron appears to have some affective knowledge

about race—that is, he cares about his friend and his friend's experiences and is angry that his

friend may potentially experience racism in his new community. I ask Aaron what he thinks

about how race plays out for different kids, rather than adults. He immediately brings up the

topic of school discipline and the police:

> **Aaron:** Well, I think that the white kids, since they have more power just, in general, in society, for reasons I don't know, I think that, you know, disciplinary actions aren't brought down as hard upon them. But when it's, you know, a black kid getting in trouble with the police, then people aren't going to be as, I think people are going to be tougher with them, because, you know, they can't really fight back as well. So I don't think it's that the black kids get in trouble more, I think they're just punished worse for it.

Aaron goes on to tell me that he believes the police go to the neighborhoods where black kids are

more likely to live and "look for trouble" and that he never sees the police in his own

neighborhood. He also tells me that even though this doesn't happen at his school, he has read

that there are racial patterns in how "disciplinary actions" are "brought down" in school settings.

I ask Aaron how he knows about this, and he tells me he read about it in a book they read at

school. He tells me he thinks this is further evidence of "unequalness" between whites and

blacks.

I ask Aaron how he feels about these topics he has brought up to me—the white elite, the

idea of a post-racial America, and racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice system. He tells

me that "That's just kind of how it is." Unlike his peers in Evergreen thus, Aaron, while able to

articulate in some ways a more concrete explanation of current forms of racism in American

society, his emotional connection to the topic is not nearly as strong. While he is very analytical

and thoughtful about the questions I raise with him, ultimately, he is not nearly as emotionally or

personally invested in these topics as other children, aside from when he talks about his Korean

friend. This is true across many of the children I interviewed in Wheaton Hills—that is, these

kids are able to talk about race and inequality, but often it is in a detached, abstract way. In the

terms of Perry and Shotwell (2007), Wheaton Hills kids, particularly those attending private

school, were able to talk in propositional terms about race very clearly yet they seemed to lack

the affective knowledge also necessary for the cultivation of an antiracist praxis.[12]

Class Inequality

If anything, Aaron's emotions are tied to social class inequality rather than racial

inequality. He becomes far more animated and fiery when we discuss "rich people" and "poor

people":

> **Maggie:** Okay. Why do you think some people have more money than other people?
>
> **Aaron:** I think some people have more money than other people, because they, maybe just because they're luckier and they get into a better school. Maybe their parents started a really, really successful banking business (making dismissive face as he says "business") or something, and they've got a lot of money to go into a really good school and get a lot of, get a very high income job.
>
> **Maggie:** So a lot of people tell me when I ask them that it's all about hard work. You know, if you work hard, then anybody can do anything. What do you think about that statement?
>
> **Aaron:** Well, if you work hard, then you'll be probably rewarded more. But, I mean, you know, there are PLENTY of very hard working people, you know, just in the middle class, the working class. And if you're really poor, then you have to work REALLY hard just to keep your family, like, alive. So and then if you look at the oil tycoons, they don't even like do anything! They just sit there and be a face. So I don't think it's hard work as much as luck almost and just kind of, you know, where you start out. If you start out really high class, then you'll probably stay there. If you start out poor, you probably won't be rich. Even if you work really hard.

Not only are Aaron's comments unusual in comparison to research that finds that many

Americans buy into the American Dream and the notion of meritocracy (Johnson 2006), but they

are also passionate and filled with an affective quality missing when discussing race. It seems

that there is something about wealth inequality that riles Aaron up in a different way than racial

inequality, though certainly he offers his analysis of both forms of inequality.

I ask Aaron how race matters in terms of the income inequality he cites, attempting to get

Aaron to draw together inequalities along racial lines and class lines. He describes employment

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[12] See Part II for a fuller description of Perry and Shotwell's (2007) argument.

discrimination, telling me that "more white people are, you know, accepted into jobs" and explaining to me that this is a problem because it means there is "no way for black people to compete if they aren't being accepted to jobs because they are black." I then ask Aaron if he thinks that America is "past race" given the outcomes of the last presidential election in which Barack Obama was elected:

> **Aaron:** I definitely don't think that [the election of Obama] put us past race. I think it showed that people are not stuck in a rut, only electing people . . . white men, but I don't think this puts us past race, because, you know, I haven't seen like racism disappear. You know, just in general, not like physically watching, but I don't think it's just disappeared, that it's still here, so I don't think it's put us past race very much.

> **Maggie:** So where do you think it still exists? Like in what, can you identify any areas where you think racism really still . . .

> **Aaron:** Well, one of my best friends I told you about earlier, who is Korean, just recently moved to Illinois. And he, he's moving to Peoria, which is a very white town, and I haven't heard from him whether or not, you know, if they're racists or anything. But from what I've heard in general about the area, they're not very accepting of other races. And I think that electing an African American president hasn't changed that, so, yeah, I don't really think that's changed at all.

While Aaron, throughout my time with him, often draws on abstract examples of racism, such as employment discrimination, or negative stereotyping of blacks by whites as they "walk down the street," or the possibility that the police spend more time in predominantly-black neighborhoods so that must be why more black kids get arrested than white kids. Yet, in this one moment, when he talks about his Korean friend, Aaron is much more ardent about the existence of racism and an affective quality is present that is lacking when Aaron talks about other examples of racism. Of note, as well, is that this Korean friend is the one person of color Aaron knows personally and spends time with outside of school or other organized contexts. I ask Aaron if he talks about race with his friend and he tells me that they often talk about his friend's experiences "being Asian." Aaron's friendship with this boy continues, despite the fact that the friend has recently moved away.

Conclusions

Overall, Mr. and Mrs. Hayes have constructed a color-conscious context of childhood for their two kids. However, this color-conscious context differs from that designed by Evergreen families in my study. Rather, the Wheaton Hills context of childhood, designed by parents like the Hayes, is heavily influenced by the priority of academic excellence and being an exceptional student. To the white, affluent parents in Wheaton Hills who I interviewed, "success" is measured by people who live here in terms of what college one is admitted to, what ACT scores one receives, how many Honor's or AP courses one takes, if one is taking the well-renowned Latin sequencing of courses, and if one is designated as "gifted and talented." In a sense, professors, doctors, and lawyers compete with one other, through their children, to see who is the "smartest." Given this priority, these parents, such as the Hayes, though liberal-minded and interested in debating inequality, for the most part, appear to be minimally interested in working for social justice or "walking the walk." While these parents talk openly with their children about race, politics, inequality, homelessness, albeit typically in very broad and abstract ways, ultimately, they want their children to succeed at school above all else. And, part of talking with their children about current events, for instance, is to, as Mr. Hayes tells me, "prepare my children for their futures," and by "futures," he clarifies for me that he means their college futures. Unlike Evergreen where "success" is measured in terms of following one's passion and advocating for others or in Sherdian where "success" is understood in terms of the amount of money one makes and the prestige of one's occupation, Wheaton Hills' families in my study are all intensely focused on academic achievement. And, this impacts the process of racial socialization in this community through the choices these parents make that are both racialized in the first place and then also have racial consequences.

As a result of parents prioritizing academic achievement and excellence, the color-conscious ideological positions that many parents, like the Hayes, appear to engage takes a backseat, so to speak, when they make choices about their children's childhoods. While the Hayes tell me that they wish they could send their kids to the Petersfield public schools in part because of the "diversity" at the schools, they also tell me that their child would not flourish there, especially due to the presence of the "low-opportunity" kids. The Hayes, I argue, participate not only in diversity discourse (which will be elaborated upon in the following chapter), they also participate in what I call justified avoidance. And, while they claim openly to support programs that work for establishing equality, they also actively work to hoard opportunities for their own children.[13] The consequences of these choices about schools, affiliated extracurriculars and the decision to live in the Wheaton Hills neighborhood altogether lead to a particular set of possible interactions for kids like Aaron.

As a result of growing up in this context, Aaron Hayes has a great deal of propositional knowledge about race but limited affective knowledge. He reads books about race, he talks to his teachers about racial politics, he has a Korean American friend with whom he talks frequently, and his parents engage in open dialogs about race in the home. Aaron can recite history for me, talk about current racialized debates, particularly those going on in Washington DC, and he can communicate openly about wealth inequality and even comment on the racial wealth gap. His school appears to critically engage multicultural curriculum. Yet, aside from his interactions with his one friend of color, Aaron lacks affective knowledge about race. The scarcity of this type of knowledge within children who attend private schools in Wheaton Hills makes it difficult for Aaron and many of his peers to move from the abstract, analytical, intellectual level of

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[13] See Lareau and Conley (2010) for more about opportunity hoarding.

understanding their position of privilege to the emotional level of feeling the type of anger, frustration, and motivation for action that kids like Conor Norton-Smith living in Evergreen experience.

However, growing up in this context also means that Aaron does not acquire the negative stereotypes of blacks, for instance, that some of the Evergreen parents notice, and panic about, in their children—like Margot's negative opinions of the black boy at school who broke her glasses. This is seemingly because kids like Aaron have very little contact with people of color. In short, while this reality is not helpful in terms of developing an anti-racist praxis, it does mitigate the aspects of intergroup contact that reproduce negative stereotyping in whites.

Altogether, Aaron, through the process of interpretive reproduction, interacts with people and ideas within a particular context of childhood. This context is different from the previous two discussed, and in some ways, is more complex in its contradictions. Aaron can talk about race openly and directly, though he does not seem to care about these topics nearly as much as he cares about class inequality, for instance. Again, Aaron, therefore, appears to possess a great deal of propositional knowledge, and even tacit knowledge about race; however, when it comes to affective knowledge, aside from his one friend who recently moved away, Aaron has very little understanding of "race-based social suffering." Aaron has a very limited sense of the "relational understanding of self, society and "other" which supports an antiracist consciousness and practice (Perry and Shotwell 2007). Without recognizing that the problems faced by others, and without appreciating that these problems are also a problem for himself, Aaron's commonsense racial knowledge, while far more informed and sophisticated than that of his peers in Sheridan, falls short of leading this child to think of himself as someone who needs to or wants to *do* anything about the social problems he knows exist.

CHAPTER 10: The Norbrook Family—Diversity Discourse

The Norbrook family lives in a large blue Cape with pretty window boxes and yellow shutters. Their home is located on one of the busy streets that runs through Wheaton Hills and getting in and out of their driveway is perilous due to the heavy traffic. Despite living on the major thruway though, their backyard leads into a neighborhood park where all of the children on the street gather in the winter for massive snowball fights and set up sprinklers to run through in the summer months. Many of the families who live near this park have children in elementary school and preschool, a younger population than the kids who live on the Hayes block, for instance.

Mr. Norbrook is a professor at the local university in Chemistry while Mrs. Norbrook is an occupational therapist. Mrs. Norbrook is a dedicated runner and was training for the Chicago Marathon when I met her. Mr. Norbrook spends all of his free time on his 30-foot Islander, *Alchemy*. Mr. and Mrs. Norbrook met in Chicago, moved to Baltimore for a brief stint while Mr. Norbrook held a post-doctoral research position, moved back to the Chicago area, living in Evanston, and then they moved to the Petersfield area when Mr. Norbrook was offered a position at the local university.

In terms of their own childhoods, Mrs. Norbrook grew up outside of Minneapolis in a predominantly white suburb while Mr. Norbrook grew up in Northern Illinois. Both parents describe their childhoods as being "homogenous" racially. Mrs. Norbrook tells me that she really started thinking about race after traveling to France in college and as a result of living in Chicago and later Baltimore in her twenties:

> When I was in France, I was really struck by issues there of like, I lived in the South of France and there were a lot of North Africans, Moroccans, people like that, and it was, there was definitely this tension there and when you go to Marseille, there are neighborhoods where they were like, "Oh don't walk through that neighborhood!" kind of thing. People would say, "That's a bad neighborhood. It's filled with North Africans. Don't walk through that neighborhood." So it

was the first time I really experienced this and I was like, "Oh my god!" And then I went home (laughing) thinking France is like this. And then I came home and I moved to Chicago after college and I'm like, "What was I thinking?? The US is the same way!" I just never saw it! So then I lived in Chicago, I took the El to work and things like that so I, I just had different experiences in my young adulthood where I realized my prejudices. I remember getting on the El and a lot of times where would be weird people, right? And so I remember in the beginning, I would try to get on the train and find the least scary person to sit next to. But what that meant was I ended up picking white people and over time, I would sit next to like some old white man, he'd be absolutely crazy. You know, the person who I would pick to be the least scary person on the train would end up being THE crazy person. (laughing) So after awhile, I was like, "This is ridiculous." I'm trying to judge these people in one second when I get on the train by how they look and obviously it wasn't working! (laughing) And so after that, you know, I read a few books at that time too, like I had read the Biography of Malcolm X and I just read things and I was becoming more interested in issues of race and my husband too was interested and so I kind of made this place that when I got on the El train, I was going to sit next to the young black man because I was like, "This is ridiculous!" Obviously, what I was doing wasn't working and young black men I knew felt like people treated them badly so I was like, "I am going to sit next to the young black man on the train" and I remember I would get on the train, and they would visibly be shocked when I sat down next to them. There would be times where someone might have their bag in the middle, kind of taking up half the seat and I'd be like, "Can I sit here?" And they'd be absolutely shocked that I stopped and asked them. So then I was like, okay obviously—and then I never had any problems!! (laughing) And I was like, "Okay you know, I obviously have prejudice. I'm afraid of young people, young black men."

Mrs. Norbrook goes on to tell me about living in Baltimore and how her awareness of her own prejudices grew deeper and then how later, when she and her husband moved back to Evanston, Illinois, a northern suburb of Chicago, she felt that it was "the ideal place" and "the type of place that would be perfect for raising children." "It was urban, racially mixed, and we lived next door to an African American doctor, she tells me. " While they tried to stay in Evanston, ultimately, Mr. Norbrook's offer for a job in Petersfield resulted in their moving.

Monica and Robert

The Norbrooks have two children, Monica who is eight, and Robert who is twelve and in 7th grade. Monica is a social butterfly, constantly asking her mom if she can have friends over or go play outside with them. As Mrs. Norbrook puts it, "She'd love to be with kids all day long!" Her mom tells me that Monica's social calendar is busier than her own with birthday parties,

sleepovers, and even plans to host a tea party while watching the Royal Wedding at 5:30am with five of her close friends.

Robert, on the other hand, is more introverted than his sister. He is a small child with brown hair and big blue eyes. While he is more introverted, he does have a small close-knit group of friends though who love to build snow forts in the winter, as part of the giant snowball fight, and occasionally play a game of Capture the Flag or tag in the park, which is basically a tree-lined open space about the size of a soccer field. Robert also plays the violin as part of his school's orchestra. Mrs. Norbrook tells me that often, when Robert gets home from school, he just needs "a breather." "It's more work for him to be around people for that long. He and his sister are very different!" their mother tells me.

School Choice: Diversity Discourse

Unlike many of their neighbors who have opted out of the Pairing B elementary school, the Norbrooks have kept their children in public school because they want their kids to have "diversity" in their lives. Monica attends Wheaton Hills Pairing B elementary school while Robert, who finished up at Pairing B last year, is in his first year at the Wheaton Hills Middle School. Both of the children are thriving in their school environments, and their parents have very positive things to say about the experiences of their children. I talk at great length with Mrs. Norbrook over my time with her family about school choice and the intense politics surrounding this question in Wheaton Hills, particularly at the elementary school level:

> We are big public school advocates. We've always kind of had that view. My husband and I both went to public school and we both went to very good schools and he was a very good student and I was a very good student. Um, and um, so then we wanted to go to public school. We don't belong to any church so we didn't have any interest in that but um, we did, I remember we did go on an open house at [a private school in town], just to check it out. I wanted to know what the story was and it's very expensive so we weren't really thinking it was a possibility, but it was more like, kinda wanted to know, if you had to leave public school, what would the parochial option be? So we did that, and that seemed like an interesting place actually. Um, but when we moved in this house and started going to the park and stuff we, there's a park right back here, and

um, we were like, "Oh what school do your kids go to?" and everyone was like, Catholic schools. And we were sort of like "Huh, okay." It makes sense, there is a Catholic school near us, people would move here that would want to go there. But um, then it just became a little bit weird where you know, we started to sense that there was this thing in the neighborhood against the school, which is [Pairing B].

I ask Mrs. Norbrook what she means by people being "a little bit weird" and how she made sense of that as a new mom to the neighborhood. She explains:

People were like, 'Oh, I just don't want my kid to be bussed across town' you know, they'd say that. And we were sort of like, "Okaaaay???" And this is like, Robert is little, he was like 3 so we started getting a little nervous. (laughing) We were like, "What happened?" but um, then we found a couple families that did go to [Pairing B] and they were like, "We love it!" and we're like, "okay" so we kind of did some background—I don't remember how we looked it up—but we kind of saw that there was this controversy with the schools in the 90s and you know, the schools had been paired together in I think 1980 for racial, it had to do with racial desegregation and then all this other stuff. So we are like, you know what, let's just give it a try and whatever.

At this point in our conversation, Mrs. Norbrook is very animated and speaking with a great deal of passion, putting down her coffee mug and instead gesturing with her hands as she speaks. While imitating the other parents with whom she spokes, she does so in a dismissive tone, slightly mocking them. It is apparent to me that she is very critical of the other affluent whites in her community for their choices to send their children to private schools when the public schools are so strong, in her view. She believes that this is because these other parents do not want their children to be in diverse spaces, which is the opposite of Mrs. Norbrook and her husband:

I WANTED my kids to go not a homogenous school but I didn't know how to make that happen and have a good life. That was really important to me. And when we moved to Petersfield, we actually thought that Petersfield wasn't going to be very diverse. We kind of had our own assumptions about Petersfield and which were actually wrong. So we didn't even think about diversity when we bought a house because we didn't even think it was possible. But um, so anyway, so when we started the school, I remember Robert started Kindergarten at Pairing B, so it's just 3 blocks away, you can walk there. And um, his Kindergarten class was 15 kids, so very small, and there was literally—it was the most diverse group I have ever been involved with, was his Kindergarten classroom. I mean, there was like 3 white children, 3 or 4 black children, you know a couple of Latinos, a Native American boy (laughing). One of the white children was, um, her parents were from Switzerland and she spoke German as a first language. It was just like, very diverse and we were like, "Wow! This is amazing." So and the school, we had a really great experience with the school. The diversity was celebrated rather than ignored, you know?

Her use of the term "diversity" here clearly refers to the racial composition of the school as she

lists off the various races and ethnicities present in her son's Kindergarten classroom. The

experience was "amazing" for her, primarily because, as she goes on to explain, her kids were

exposed to different cultures and languages and ideas at very young ages, something she wishes

she had had in her own childhood. Interestingly, there is very little mention of racism or

inequality in this discussion but rather an uncritical praise of the classroom demographics and the

enjoyable celebration of diversity. Mrs. Norbrook focuses on the multiculturalism present in the

school and how that made the school more interesting for her children, drawing a contrast

between celebrating diversity and "ignoring it." Later in our time together when we are just

casually chit-chatting, Mrs. Norbrook confides in me that she strongly judges many of her

neighbors that opt out of public school and believes that they do so because they are "racist" and

"huge hypocrites."

Mrs. Norbrook also tells me that she thinks parent's political identification has a lot to do

with who stays in the public schools and who opts out, the key to this being how parents view the

importance of diversity:

> One thing about living in this neighborhood and going to Pairing B is the school, because of its
> diversity, it selects out extremely liberal parents who care about diversity. Anyone who is more
> conservative or middle of the road, whatever you want to call it, they might go to parochial for
> the test scores and all that. They are the ones who say diversity isn't important. And so in this
> neighborhood, that's one of the things about living here is we've got kids right here, in this little
> court behind who go to [lists off 5 schools in town]…we've got 5 schools! But it's the parents
> who care about diversity who stay in the public schools.

Her repeated use of the word "diversity" consistently refers to race, and she assumes that I know

that that is what she means. As Bell and Hartmann (1997) write:

> Our interviews suggest that in the United States today, individuals tend to discuss cultural
> difference under the rhetorical or linguistic umbrella of diversity. This is not to suggest that race
> is absent from American conceptions of diversity. Race appeared frequently in our interviews—
> not as the linguistic trope for difference, but in the actual experiences and cultural categories that
> most people, regardless of race, have in mind when they talk about diversity.

And, as Haley et al. write, the problem with this sort of uncritical multiculturalism or "diversity"

discourse" is that participation in it has the potential to reify who is "ethnic", who has "culture"

and who is "normal":

> In the absence of an exploration of power, a shallow approach to multiculturalism unlikely to move individuals to a greater understanding of how social justice or inequality create many differences. Worse yet, a multicultural approach can reify the power of whiteness over people of color in a setting purported to be a multicultural celebration" (64).

So while Mrs. Norbrook is thoughtful about the racial composition of individuals or the

"diversity" present in her children's lives and truly wants, from a position of privilege to provide

her children with an experience of racial socialization that challenges the status quo, at times, she

appears to overlook the more critical aspects tied to the promotion of multiculturalism.

At other times, though, Mrs. Norbrook does talk about, for instance, "historic oppression" with

her children. She tells them about how privileged they are because of their skin color, she

answers their questions about race when they ask, and I witnessed her discuss residential

segregation with her son at one point, a conversation that included a rich dialog about the use of

restrictive covenants and "white flight" in the past and how that impacts racial demographics of

particular neighborhoods today. As I have documented in my field notes, I also witnessed Mrs.

Norbrook explain to her kids at great length how "not all moms get the quality health care I got

when I was pregnant with you," telling her children that many times, it is moms who don't have

a lot of money that can't get health care and in a place like Petersfield, that means "a lot of black

and Latino moms can't get health care" and how that impacts the babies' health (field notes).

However, at other moments, she seems to participate in shallow multiculturalism, or the

uncritical celebration of different non-white people's cultures and backgrounds. She is very

different than her neighbors who actively avoid interactions with people of color (though often

justify their behavior so they are not looked down upon) as well as people she knows who "truly

believe racism no longer exists," demonstrative of her rejection of colorblind racial ideology.

Class not Race

While Mrs. Norbrook recognizes the power of race in American society, when it comes to Petersfield, she seems to draw more heavily on arguments that evoke the reality of socioeconomic disparity rather than focusing on racial disparity, or even thinking about the intersections of race and class. In this way, many of the comments of Mrs. Norbrook about the local community include class reductionist arguments—that, in her terms, "race isn't the real issue here. It's class."

As we discuss the Pairing politics in Wheaton Hills, I ask Mrs. Norbrook if her perspectives of the school or the students who attended the school changed over time as her children spent more time there:

> Um, over time, we definitely did start to feel out these things… and we noticed the income disparity. Like in Kindergarten, you know a lot of the kids would get free and reduced lunch and so Robert would, he wanted to bring his lunch every day. He just didn't want to do the school lunch thing and we'd actually encouraged him, they give you the menu and you pick what you want, and he tried it a couple times and was like "Ugggh. Gross." So he took his lunch every day, and I remember there was this one boy in his Kindergarten class, I would see him when I dropped him off or went to his locker, and the boy would be like, "Why does Robert bring his lunch everyday?" And I would say, "Oh he just wants to" and he would kind of look at me like, "Okay…?" Like he just didn't get it. It wasn't an option for him and so one time, I remember, he was very outgoing, very talkative kid so everything came out and um, I remember one time he was like, "But, who makes his lunch?" And I was like, "Well his dad does." (laughing) and the kid was like—it was just these weird interactions where it was almost like the kids didn't know what to make of you. They didn't have the same—they'd be like, "Why are you walking to school?" And that's fine because there is a busing thing and that would probably happen if we started at the other school and bused there, maybe Henry would be like, "Why do they walk" but there's just like these weird things where you can just tell that these lives are passing but they didn't resemble each others in a lot of ways…

I asked Mrs. Norbrook if the kids who were receiving free and reduced lunch were the white kids in her neighborhood. She tells me that no, typically it was and is Latino children and African American children. She goes on to talk more candidly about this observation along with others:

Every year that Robert was at Pairing B, I swear, there was only maybe one year where this didn't happen, every year, an African American child would disappear mid-year and one day Robert would be like, "Oh you know, so and so moved away" And I'd be like, "Oh where did he go?" "Well the teacher thought maybe Kansas City" You know and it was like that. And then you'd ask the teacher and they'd be like, "Yeah I found out on Friday" and it would, you know things would happen, and the teachers would sometimes let on little things about, you know, just in passing, they probably shouldn't have, but they'd say things like, "Well you know I give him a little extra because I know there's not a lot of food at home" or "You know" just like little things. Some of these kids' families were really distressed. They weren't just low income--they were DISTRESSED. And often it seemed like it was the African American families that were the worst off. And if you went to programs at night, like um, different PTO things or whatever, it would be mostly the white families, some Latino families, sometimes there would be an interpreter to understand the program and there would be almost no African American families. And um, it was kind of, over time though, it because you know, it bothered you. The African American families would come out for musical shows, so anytime the kids performed like concerts, they would come out in full force, so it's like what's going on? I guess, you know, I always wonder, do they not feel comfortable? Do they have no experience about what a PTO was? You know, maybe they hadn't gone to schools where there even was one. I just don't even know. So there was like these weird little things that manifested over time.

I ask Mrs. Norbrook if she is friends with any of the parents of the African-American children at school. She tells me that the only parents she knows who have African-American children "are either adopted or they are a mixed family." I ask her why she thinks that is and she tells me that she thinks it is a "class issue" more than a race issue—she would be friends with other parents but due to class divides, they just "live different lives." She tells me that she connects more with families that live lives that "in many ways resemble ours" like the neighbors who are a mixed race family, the father being black and the mother white. Both of the parents are professionals and the families do many things together. Despite telling me at length about the experiences and observations of families of color, she ends by saying, and "it's sad because you know, I think a lot of the differences are more socio economic kind of class issues. Yes they are African-American, but it's not because of that. It's poverty."

Demographic Shifts and Dual Language Program

Unlike the Hayes and many other Wheaton Hills families who opt for private schooling options, the Norbrooks have a much clearer sense of the racial demographics at Pairing B,

largely because their children attend and attended this school. Mrs. Norbrook explains to me how the demographics are in flux:

> I think a lot of African Americans have moved out of that part of town and are moving to the [other] side, so there is some movement happening. More Latinos have moved in. So they've like flipped. That neighborhood on the west side, I have a feeling that it has just been in flux forever. It's like the place where people land who are new and who are, you know, immigrants, whatever so. Um, I think when Pairing B started, it was more of a black neighborhood, and now it's much more diverse so, a lot more Latinos live here and the Latino families seem much more like nuclear families.

Mrs. Norbrook is aware of the increase in the Latino population at Pairing B, which again, is remarkably different than how her affluent white peers down the street who send their children to private schools of all kinds perceive the school. Certainly, however, even in Mrs. Norbrook's comments, the meaning of "black" families and "Latino" families represents different things in this community. Making mention of the "nuclear" immigrant families who have moved into the poorer neighborhood of Pairing B suggests that the black families who lived in that area prior to this change did not embody this family structure that people generally view as better. In combination with her remarks about how some of the Latino parents attend the PTO meetings and other school events, Mrs. Norbrook draws out the distinctions between black parents and Latino parents, clearly feeling more positive about the latter.

However, while Mrs. Norbrook is far more positive about Pairing B and genuinely believes her children are having positive, healthy, and "diverse" experiences at school unlike many of the children living in white affluent families around them, she thinks the growth of the Latino population across the Midwest is "interesting" and seems to subtly suggest that she is uncomfortable with this expansion:

> Yeah, the Latinos, I think throughout the Midwest, the Latino population has just exploded. Um, you know, one of the towns I know about in northern Illinois used to be very German, Irish, you know, farm families, and you go there now and there's a lot of Latino shops, they own shops and shops that cater to Latinos, you know, it's, things have really changed so yeah, so it's uh, interesting.

We continue to talk about changes in Pairing B, and Mrs. Norbrook brings up the newly

implemented dual language program:

> Mrs. Norbrook: Now Pairing B has started a language immersion program, a dual language immersion program…They just started this year and so Kindergarten was the first year, and so with those kids, it will move up but it's going to change the schools because they have to hire teachers who can do that and then so some of the other teachers leave or get reassigned or whatever um but it also (sigh), well we had noticed this before. Some of the Latino kids go into the ESL classes and they are segregated so while the school is diverse, some of the Latinos are kept apart and um, sometimes they enter the mainstream classes later on, but it's a little bit funny because the kids sort of are like side by side but they're not interacting. I mean, if they are speaking Spanish most of the day, they are not going to be speaking English that much on the playground, you know, so uh we had noticed that too. There's always Latino kids in the mainstream, ones who spoke English from birth even.

I ask Mrs. Norbrook if she is planning to enroll her children in the immersion program at the

school. She has some hesitation:

> When I first heard about it, I thought, oh it will be 50/50 English/Spanish, but that's not how they do it. It's NINETY Spanish, ten percent English, so their main teachers speak Spanish to them almost 100% and they get the English in maybe special classes like art, gym, but if you're a child from an English speaking family and you're thrown into, it's very stressful that Kindergarten fall, to go to school and to have someone speaking to you you can't understand. Um and so there are only some personalities that would adapt to that really well. Other people I know, one of the families back over here, their daughter did that and it was a little hard in the beginning and I don't quite understand the theory behind it. If it's, if it's not educationally recommended to throw Spanish speakers into an English classroom, why is it educationally recommended to throw an English speaker into a Spanish classroom (laughing) like it totally doesn't make sense to me. The reason we have ESL classes is because we think that they need to learn to read and write in their own language first, so why wouldn't that be true in the reverse? So I don't know. Um, I probably wouldn't have done that with Robert just because of his personality and I don't know about Monica but, I mean, I would love for my kids to speak another language fluently and having learned a language in high school and college, I understand why it would be so much better if they learned it now, but um (sigh) I don't know about throwing a Kindergartner into a 90% Spanish situation so, but, you know, they do these things and it does affect the school. It affects who the principal is going to be—they now have a principal who has a background in bilingual education, and it affects teachers, long-term teachers who don't have any Spanish, they have to move on to other schools so anyway.

Mrs. Norbrook goes on to tell me about her friend who has her child in the program. She tells me

how challenging it was for her friend because:

> They would go to like open house and things like that and the teacher would only speak Spanish to them and they don't speak Spanish (laughing) so they'd say, it's a little bit weird, the relationship, you just don't feel like you can have the same kind of relationship with someone because you don't speak the language. So you can't just chit chat, it's just not the same.

Mrs. Norbrook is skeptical of the language immersion program and while she certainly engages in a conversation about it more than many of her peers who avoid the school altogether, she thinks primarily of how her own children will either benefit or not benefit from the program, rather than thinking about the program in broader terms. Thus, while she articulates a perspective that values diversity and recognizes systematic inequality to some extent, when it comes to her own children, she is wary of putting them in an environment where they would have what she perceives to be a "disadvantage." Further, while she takes on the perspective of her English-only-speaking friend who feels isolated at the open house, she does not compare that to how Spanish-only-speaking parents most likely feel when they come to an open house conducted in English only.

Talking to Kids about Race

While we talk a great deal about what goes on in her mind and the minds of other white parents in Wheaton Hills when it comes to the issue of school choice, we also talk about what goes on in her own home. For instance, I ask her if she thinks racism is still a problem in the United States and how she addresses the topic of racism with her kids. Mrs. Norbrook offers a structural argument for the persistence of inequities and talks about how she has shared this information with her kids:

> Yeah (sigh) I mean, racial inequality is the result of historic oppression and oppression that continues today. That's how I account for it and I just, and also more recent policies and how people have been discriminated against. This neighborhood did not allow black people to live in it when it was built in the 1930s. It had a covenant against um African Americans and, what else? It may have had other ones, I don't know. Um, so when we bought our house, I remember, you get like these documents, like historical kind of deed thing and I remember, I'm the kind of person who likes to look at that kind of thing and I was like reading through it and I was like, "OH MY GODDD!" (laughing) Now, obviously these things, they all were rendered null and void when, I think, some Supreme Court decision back in the 60s or something but um, it's historic. If black

people weren't allowed to live here in the beginning, then there is no history of anyone living here, then you know what I mean? I think a lot of the neighborhoods in Wheaton Hills are like this…a lot of these developments in the early 20th century had these covenants. Like you couldn't sell your house to a black person and it may have had other ones too, religious ones or, I can't remember the details. So, um, yeah, it's sad. Um. Yeah, it was institutionalized. It is horrifying. So I talked to the kids about that one so they understand the recent history of this stuff and see how it impacts today.

Mrs. Norbrook provides a concrete example of racism when talking to her children—restrictive covenants that existed in the exact neighborhood and house that she and her family lives. I ask her how the children responded to learning about this, and she tells me they were shocked. "They had no idea such a thing even existed," she tells me. She continues by sharing anecdotes with me from the past about her children's recognition of racial difference:

Well one thing we have always kind of done is in the beginning, we wouldn't use labels for people. So if we were talking about someone at school, "Oh, who is Jose? Is he the one that is the Latino kid?" or whatever. We wouldn't say that. We would say, "Is he the one who has brown hair and light brown skin and kind of shorter than you?" or whatever. We would try to like physically describe the kids and um, so for a long time, they didn't have those terms, especially Robert. He didn't really use labels to describe people. Monica, it because, I think because she is just so much more of a chatty person and talked a lot more to people and she actually would come home and say, she started staying, "Well Myra said that she is black and I am white." So like she learned it from classmates, like to label, like these labels. So it was interesting. I mean, even to this day, I'll still try to describe people. "Does she have braids?" that kind of thing.

A few things seem to be going on here. First, by not teaching children about racial categories or the history of different racial groups for fear of reproducing stereotypes, Mrs. Norbrook is in effect, concretizing the shallow multiculturalism into daily practice. Unlike colorblind ideology that views everyone as the same, Mrs. Norbrook's approach seems to view everyone as different, but only insofar as what they look like—their skin or their hair. Second, Monica coming home from school and announcing she is white reflects her agency and her own participation in her racial socialization. However, this event would not be possible if she did not interact with Myra at school who told her she was white.

While Mrs. Norbrook sticks to her approach of not using racial categories, Monica still manages to produce racial knowledge by making observations and interacting with the world around her. Her mother tells me the following story:

> There is one sort of unfortunate thing that came—you know, you send your kids to this really diverse place and…the hope is that they won't be prejudiced, right? Well what if the make up makes them assume things about people who are similar. So what happened was that Monica was very observant and notices things and notices people and that kind of thing. She would um, she would, she said to me a couple times when she was in first grade, "It seems like all the kids with brown skin, don't behave well." And you're like, "Oh god! That's not what we were hoping!!" But that kinda is what her experience was. She was telling me what her experience was and to this day, I don't know. She hasn't said that recently, but I think she's had different kids in her class too. It's just the chance too of who she ended up having in her class but uh (sigh) so she definitely notices those things, like makes inferences from groups of people and all of her friends are from Wheaton Hills, for the most part, or the ones that she does stuff with outside of school. Um, she definitely is school-friends with some kids from the who are minorities but she doesn't ever ask to do anything with them outside of school and I definitely don't push my kids to do things with kids that they don't, that they're not showing any interest in, for the most part. So it's been a little bit sad in that regard. I really should try to encourage those friendships more.

Similar to the concerns held by Evergreen parents of intergroup contact resulting in the reinforcement of negative stereotypes of black children, Mrs. Norbrook works with her kids to acknowledge the behaviors in particular children in ways that do not lead to the kids drawing broad inferences about racial groups as a whole. She also mentions how she wishes her daughter would pursue friendships with children of color more, regretfully stating that she feels like she could do more to facilitate those relationships. I ask her why she wants to encourage these relationships and she tells me that she believes in the value of diversity.

While the Norbrooks do not participate in justified avoidance like many of their neighbors do, when Mrs. Norbrook talks about her rationale for keeping her children in public school, she brings up "diversity" though does not seem to always contextualize or complicate this term—or even speak openly about race as a very particular type of diversity rather than drawing on the racial euphemism of "diversity."

This color-conscious ideological perspective—one that lacks affective knowledge for the most part—shapes the choices that the Norbrooks make about schools, neighborhoods, friends, etc., which then leads to a particular set of available interactions for their kids. As I will discuss next, through the interactions that Robert has at school and at home, Robert produces his own unique understanding about race—an understanding that includes propositional, tacit, but rarely affective racial knowledge (Perry and Shotwell 2007).

Robert's Perspectives on Race

Twelve-year old Robert and I sit together in his living room with mugs of water and a tray of cookies. He is wearing a green t-shirt and jeans and has a very serious demeanor. His mother tells me privately before he comes into the room that while he told her he was "sorta nervous" about his interview with me, he was also very excited and was "taking it very seriously." I can tell he really wants to eat a cookie by the way he keeps glancing at them, but it is clear that he is also trying to be serious and stay focused on me and for some reason, is trying to avoid the cookies.

Robert goes to public school, and we discuss the racial makeup of Wheaton Hills Middle School. Unlike the Pairing B elementary school where Robert went to elementary school, the racial demographics of the middle school in this area are as follows:

	Pairing B (grades 4-6)	Wheaton Hills Middle (grades 7-8)
White	31	62
Black	16	7
Latino	35	9
Asian	14	16
More than 1 race	4	6

Table 6. Racial composition of Pairing B and Wheaton Hills Middle

These demographics are very different and reflect the fact that the children who go to Pairing B are not necessarily kept together when they go into grades 7 and 8. Everyone joins back up again in high school, but the way the pairing system works, children who are together in grades 1-6 do not remain together in 7th and 8th grade necessarily. Instead, everyone attends smaller middle schools located closer to their homes rather than the district maintaining a bussing system. One of the effects of this arrangement is that cross-group friendships formed in elementary school are more difficult to maintain as the kids enter later stages of middle childhood and enter into grades 7 and 8. The kids are not on the same sports teams outside of school given that they live across town from one another. They cannot walk or bike to one another's houses, and as Mrs. Norbrook explained previously, the parents are not always friends when they live across town from each other (and perhaps due to reasons connected to justified avoidance.) Thus, kids like Robert, even when they have black or Latino friends from the other side of town in elementary school, may not be able to easily sustain these relationships as they enter middle school, an important developmental stage in terms of peer groups (Corsaro new article).

Robert notices this first hand. "There are dark skinned and light skinned kids in my school," he tells me, drawing on the descriptions that his mother has taught him to use rather than using categories like 'black' or 'white,' "but in elementary school, there were a lot more dark skinned kids in my class than now." He goes on:

> But, well, it seems…um it seems like most of the kids at my school have light skin. There are not many dark skin kids. There are some, but most of them are light skinned….there's some people that have like, I don't know how to describe it, like uh…….people from Asia. Yeah. You see that kind of person.

Robert stumbles over how to describe the Asian students in his class at school. He finally gives up and just says "people from Asia" but I notice that Robert seems visibly uncomfortable when I use racial categories myself like "Latino" or "white," preferring instead the descriptions of people's skin color.

Because I notice his hesitation here, I start using his terminology. For instance, I ask Robert if his friends have the same color skin as he does. He replies, "Most of my friends live in this neighborhood, so other than one kid, they all have light skin. I used to have dark skinned friends but they live far away and I don't see them as much." I ask Robert if he wishes he had more friends who had a different skin color than him. "I don't really care what skin color or religion my friends are," he tells me confidently. "Do you and your friends ever talk about that stuff?" I ask in response? "Not really," he tells me.

I also ask Robert if the "light skinned kids" and the "dark skin kids" mix together or if they stay separated at the middle school. He tells me, "everyone mixes together." We talk about who gets in trouble and he tells me that he does not think any group of people gets in trouble more than other groups of people. So too does he tell me that he thinks all the kids are smart and the light skinned kids are "not smarter than the dark skinned kids." When I ask him if he has ever witnessed any racism at school, he tells me that with the exception of racist jokes, he does not

think his school is racist or there are "problems of racism" at his school. We talk more about

racist jokes:

> **Robert:** Actually, one of my friends made this slightly racist joke but I don't think he was trying to be racist.
>
> **Maggie:** Did anyone say anything to him after he did that?
>
> **Robert:** Well, before he said it, he said it was kind of racist so…
>
> **Maggie:** So he said, this is kind of a racist joke BUT
>
> **Robert:** But it's still funny. Yeah. That's what he said I think.
>
> **Maggie:** Did that somehow make it okay?
>
> **Robert:** Not really. It didn't make it okay but it was still better than not acknowledging it.

I ask Robert if he can think of any other examples of racism at school or around him.

Interestingly, and like many other Wheaton Hills children, Robert tells me about racism that he

"knows about" that exists at a level far beyond the context of Petersfield. For example, Robert

tells me:

> Well I heard about this guy who was burning one of the Muslim holy books because there's like people who don't like any Muslims because of the terrorist attacks so that's racist. I also heard about people who won't sell their house to someone who is dark skinned like our house a long time ago. I also like heard about people, like white supremacist groups or something who didn't like dark skinned people. I haven't seen any open, haven't really seen any people be openly racist. Maybe in private they say things though.

I push Robert on his final point of the possibility of people saying things in private that are racist.

He replies:

> **Robert:** I mean like, everyone has tiny prejudices with people so it's like, I don't know.
>
> **Maggie:** Tiny prejudices?
>
> **Robert:** Yeah, tiny little things that I might not even know that you have them. Like subconsciously thinking. I think that is where people don't realize, like, if they are racist without realizing it.

I ask Robert if he learned about this idea of "tiny prejudices" at school or from his parents and he

tells me that he "just thought it up." Intriguingly, his theory sounds very similar to sociological

theories of implicit racial bias. Robert goes on to tell me that light skinned people have "lots of advantages that they don't even realize" in addition to negative stereotypes about other races (or skin colors) about which they are unaware. Later, I ask Robert's mom if she remembers ever hearing Robert talk about this and she is surprised (and impressed) with her son's answer, telling me that she has no idea where he came up with that but that "it sounds right" to her and that she intends to discuss this idea further with Robert after I leave. She laughs and tells me that "raising children has made realize how smart and perceptive kids really are."

This moment reflects the bidirectional nature of racial socialization described by Hughes (2003). Robert's theory of tiny prejudices will ignite a conversation between him and his mom, and probably his whole family, about this idea. This moment also demonstrates the active role children play in their own racial socialization through their unique interpretations of the world. Interpretations of the world, however, that depend upon the racial context of childhood designed for them by their parents.

While Robert does mention a few brief examples about the potential for local racism, overall, his comments to me suggest that in his mind, racism is something that certainly exists today in America and that continues to provide light skinned people with unfair advantages, but that it is "out there" rather than "here." This abstract and removed understanding of contemporary racism is common amongst the kids in Wheaton Hills with whom I spoke. While they can tell me about white privilege, housing and employment discrimination, current examples of racist acts of individuals in other parts of the country, and even racialized patterns in policing, these kids do not tell me about racism within their own community. As such, it appears that from their vantage points, yes, racism exists but it doesn't exist around them for the most part. This notion is similar to kids in Sheridan who do not believe that racism exists at their

school but also strikingly different from kids growing up in Sheridan who believe that racism is altogether a thing of the past and no longer a problem in America today.

Based on the racial context of childhood constructed by Mr. and Mrs. Norbrook, Robert is a middle school child who is willing to talk about race, though does so tentatively, being sure to describe people's skin color rather than place them in some predetermined socially constructed racial category. Yet, clearly he is aware that these categories exist, evidenced by him understanding what I mean when I use them as well as his occasional use of terms like "white" in his discussion of racism today. Robert does appear somewhat fearful of saying the wrong thing to me and has absolutely internalized the fact that talking about race can be a potentially controversial topic and one that can lead to people feeling "offended." I talk to Robert about this after we turn off the microphone—he appears at ease the moment the microphone is shut off. He tells me more casually that he "doesn't want to say something offensive." I ask him why he thinks that I might perceive him as saying something "offensive," and he tells me that sometimes he is worried he might say something that a dark skinned person is "hurt" by and that he doesn't want to do that. He tells me that sometimes not talking about the differences between people is "easier"—that avoiding conversations about race, particularly with other kids who are dark skinned—is better than saying something that hurts someone's feelings. This striking comment, after the microphone was shut off, seems to speak to the white culture of Wheaton Hills at large. While people living here, kids and adults alike, are aware that race matters in significant ways, they avoid talking about it to avoid "hurting people's feelings."

However, this avoidance—whether it is Robert's type of avoidance (not talking about race with people of color) or avoidance through "happy talk" about diversity (shallow multiculturalism) or even the justified avoidance discussed in the previous chapter (making

socially acceptable justifications for avoiding people of color or dialog about race in Petersfield)—is cited by many people of color living in Petersfield (evidenced through my own personal correspondence and informant interviews with black Petersfield residents and leaders, my attendance of meetings of black parents, and through reading newspaper editorials and blogs written by black members of the community), as one of the major roadblocks for making racial progress in a city like Petersfield—a place that is filled white, highly educated, affluent liberals yet such massive racial inequities. The incarceration rate of black men between the ages of 20-24 is off the charts (one of the highest in the country!), the achievement gap and gap in graduation rates between white students and students of color is tremendously large (Only 53% of black students graduated in 2012 from Petersfield public high schools—yet the school districts website brags that Petersfield students pass Advanced Placement exams at a rate more than 14% above the state average, that the school district has more than five times the National Merit Scholar Semifinalists than a district its size would have on average, and that Petersfield students outperform other students on the ACT college entrance exam.)

Finally, I conducted some participant observations of a group of boys in my sample who knew each other at a laser tag event. All of the children at the laser tag event were white, and most of the parents present were fathers. The only other space in which I spent time in Petersfield that was dominated by fathers was ice hockey practice where I was literally the only woman present. In these spaces consisting predominantly of white men and their sons, I was often approached and the fathers made small talk with me. I used these opportunities to casually bring up the topic of race. At this particular laser tag event, I casually asked a father (not the father of Robert) who had struck up a conversation with me why he thought most of the families present were white. With the kids standing within earshot, he laughed and made a comment

about black fathers, something along the lines of "If African American boys had fathers who were around, maybe they could go to Laser Tag too." This particular white father expressed dismissal and feelings of condescension toward black fathers. When I asked non-confrontationally, "What do you mean?" he looked at me, paused, and stated, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean anything offensive by that," carrying on with some explanation of what he "actually" meant to say—something about black men being targets in society so that's why they "can't parent" their kids. In this moment, while disconnected from the Norbrooks and Robert, it became apparent to me that white people work extremely hard in Wheaton Hills to come across as "socially acceptable." Whether it is in the off-hand remarks that they make that they then "take back" because they realize the listener isn't on board with them, whether it is justifying their choices about private schools, or whether it is celebrating diversity and multiculturalism while only sometimes talking about oppression, many of these white families avoid the real, challenging, honest conversations about race out of fear of being judged as not liberal enough in the eyes of their white peers—which is not about people of color, their struggles or their feelings whatsoever in the way that Robert expresses fear. While Robert does not want to hurt a dark-skinned person's feelings, this white father does not want me to think he is "racist" or not as progressive or educated as he wants me to believe. This laser tag incident was not the only time I had an experience like this with white adults. My time working as a coach in the community provided countless examples of white parents, teachers, and other coaches commenting to me about the dysfunction of black families in particular, then changing their tune when I pushed them on the topic.

Conclusions

While Mrs. Norbrook, in comparison to some of her Wheaton Hills peers, talks much more extensively about oppression, systems of power, and structural racism with her children, challenging dominant forms of tacit racial knowledge, or ideological knowledge such as that of colorblindness. She also participates in diversity discourse, celebrating multiculturalism in a way that does little to challenge or recognize racial or ethnic inequalities. Her children also spend time around other whites, like the dad at Laser Tag, who participate in aversive racism (Dovidio 2000), or who express their dislike of minorities when they think they can get away with it. Mrs. Norbrook does not provide many opportunities for her children to form affective racial knowledge, though she Mrs. Norbrook rarely participates in justified avoidance in the same ways as many of the other affluent, white parents she knows. Perhaps the exceptions to this include her pushback to the language immersion program and her feeling of disconnection from the parents of the children who attend Pairing B who live on the other side of town and who are disproportionately black and Latino. She does her best to raise her children in a way that she believes teaches them that human diversity is a positive thing, that racism still exists, and that white privilege is something about which her children must be aware. However, what this ideological position lacks is an affective component, or the emotional component. In the terms Perry and Shotwell (2007) use, the Norbrooks have the propositional knowledge and tacit knowledge necessary to move towards an antiracist praxis. However, they do not have—or at least they do not have enough of—the affective knowledge that leads to a range of emotional feelings that scholars of antiracism focus on exclusively (without considering propositional or tacit knowledge). This means that not only do the Norbrooks not participate in direct-response social justice action, responding to specific incidents of racism, but they also do not participate in separate, non-reactionary behaviors such as living in integrated neighborhoods or actively

seeking out relationships with people of color, or voting for school policies that support political agendas of actualizable racial progress. And, these choices contribute to how their children then produce knowledge about race. However, unlike the Hayes family, for instance, who actively avoid these nonreactive behaviors, the Norbrook's do send their children to the public schools in the face of the negative judgments of their white, affluent peers. And, while the white racial logic associated with the public schools in Wheaton Hills is complicated and filled with nuance and performances of being politically correct, ultimately, the Norbrooks support their local public schools and send their children to them. While the rationale for this is somewhat shallow and embodies what Bell and Harttman refer to as "happy talk" about diversity, the lived experience of kids like Robert in this school goes beyond that. While Robert does not talk about racism within his local community, he is aware that racism is still a problem in the US (thereby rejecting hegemonic colorblind ideology), he has interactions with peers of color, his sister may or may not be enrolled in an language immersion program in which his entire family will need to learn Spanish, and he has developed sophisticated ideas about race such as his notion of the "tiny prejudices" that people hold or the recognition that the racial makeup of his middle school is different than that of his elementary school. Robert is aware of his own privilege and the "advantages" of light-skinned people, and is socially aware that feelings can be hurt when it comes to talking about race, especially with people of color, though also with other whites. While Robert is aware of racism though, much like Aaron Hayes, he does not feel compelled to *do* anything about the inequality he knows exists.

CHAPTER 11: The Boone Family—"Good" Diversity, Obesity, and Religion as Justified Avoidance

The Boone family lives in a charming green cottage-style home with white trim and a tall arched wooden front door. The house has steep roof pitches and casement windows with small panes. Planters with flowers sit outside the front door on the step and the grass is neatly trimmed, though certainly not manicured. On the street in front of the house is a gray old clunker car that belongs to a friend of Josh Boone. The two boys are hanging out at the Boone's house. Josh is sixteen and is finishing up high school at Wheaton Hills High School. A pink bicycle is propped up against the side of the house. This bike belongs to Jessica, an eleven-year-old girl in fifth grade at Saint Mary's School, which is one of the private Catholic schools in Petersfield.

Josh and Jessica are very different from one another. While Josh is a somewhat reserved and cynical teenager, Jessica is, as her mother puts it, a "chirpy" middle school kid. Jessica chatters away, talking about her friends, her teachers, her dance class, her pets and anything else that comes to mind. She is a compassionate and kind child, always thinking about how others feel and coming up with ways to make the people around her happy. She loves to dance and sing and seems to be filled with joy every time I see her. When she bursts in the door after school, she yells in a sing-songy voice, "MAAAA-MAAAA!!!!!! I'm hooooome!" throwing her backpack on the ground near the front door and tossing her shoes or boots aside, running in her socks to greet her mother and cuddle with her for a moment before taking off to the kitchen for a snack.

Mrs. Boone is a short plump woman with a warm smile and curly brown shoulder-length hair. She often wears corduroy jumpers with turtlenecks, patterned tights, clogs and, if she is in the house, an apron. She is very welcoming and hospitable, offering me tea and cookies straight out of the oven the moment I walk in the door. She often volunteers at the kids' schools and is

involved in the PTA as well as various fundraising activities. She also hosts elaborate birthday parties for her children and enjoys doing crafty projects and loves baking.

Mrs. Boone grew up in a white, affluent suburb of Milwuakee where "there were probably, barely, you know, just a couple handfuls of blacks? It was more the ethnic minority would have been…Hispanic." In reflecting on the population of the schools she attended as a child, she tells me, "Um, there was not a great degree in economic variety within the minority. There would be greater diversity with, economic diversity, within the white population in that school." Later, when I ask Mrs. Boone about the nature of residential segregation where she grew up, she tells me that this town is "primarily always white" though "there would be pockets of the ethnics," which is her way of making reference to non-whites.

Mrs. Boone moved to Petersfield in college, where she met her husband Mr. Boone, who grew up in a very small farming community in Wisconsin that was entirely white. Mrs. Boone tells me that the adjustment to college was somewhat challenging for her husband as he was one of the first in his family to attend college given that his family had always focused on farming rather than academics. However, in her family, the expectation was that all of the children would attend college, much like the expectation for Josh and Jessica today. After college, Mrs. Boone got a job in communications while her husband began his career in real estate.

The Boones were married and decided to travel extensively throughout Europe though "above a particular latitude," as Mrs. Boone puts it, referencing their avoidance of Bosnia, Kosovo and other places experiencing political turmoil in the 1990s. Being in Europe around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall had a powerful impact on Mr. and Mrs. Boone. And across their various travels, particularly in Eastern Europe, they learned a great deal about the conditions of many children growing up in this part of the world. As a result, they decided they

wanted to adopt a child, particularly after witnessing the conditions of this part of Europe at this time. Mrs. Boone quit her job when she and her husband adopted Josh. "We wanted to start a family by doing what we can to um help with the aftermath of the [Berlin] wall coming down," she explains. After Jessica, their second child, was born, Mrs. Boone decided to start doing freelance work, which she continues to do periodically when she feels like it. Mr. Boone works at the university in the Business School, in addition to continuing his career in business.

Parenting Priorities

The Boones enjoy living in Petersfield—"we always were wanting to get back here before we moved back", Mrs. Boone tells me. And while they are largely happy in this community, during the time of data collection, they were frustrated with their community due to a large political argument that was underway. The Boone parents identify as "neutral" when it come to politics and while they keep up with the news, they are not inclined to attend protests or rallies or get into political arguments with their neighbors or friends. Mrs. Boone describes feeling very frustrated with the fighting and "half-truths on both sides" and wants things to calm down and "take their course" over time. "You've got the lefts and the rights all screaming here right now. It's all about ideology," she explains. I ask Mrs. Boone how she is talking to her children about the political turmoil surrounding them. She responds:

> Um, we are trying to be very Switzerland and very neutral and cover both issues and I go through political fact check.com. They are welcome to go up there [to where the rallies are being held] and protest, especially Josh, but, before they go, they need to know both sides so that they are making an informed choice not a social and emotive choice.

Mrs. Boone thinks it is important for her children to understand multiple sides of arguments and think in critical ways such that they form their own opinions about controversial topics rather than going along with the crowd or being apathetic altogether. She describes to me how her family is "divided" along political lines and how she works hard to navigate political differences

held by people in her life. Her family of origin, she tells me, is very divided, so she has had a lot of experience dealing with people from across the political spectrum.

Mrs. Boone prioritizes developing critical thinking skills in her children and approaches parenting with this priority in mind. However, perhaps a more central parenting priority, she tells me—in addition to her Catholic faith and teaching her children about Catholicism—is (1) her commitment to fairness and (2) exposing her children to international "flavors":

> Yeah, well, um one of our governing principles would be fairness, trying to give everyone an equal shot and things. We are also very much interested in international travel and bringing international influences into our lives. So, I think we might be um, the more proactive in bringing in the international perspective. We are members of [an organization] so when the school system, the university starts up, you have these people coming from all parts of the world, off the plane, and they can't get in their dorms or they can't get in their apartments so we will take them for a couple days until they are set. So our kids, have, you know, met a woman from Greenland, China, North Kor-no I mean South Korea, sorry. And, who else have we had? Oh we had an Indian one time…So [the kids] get those flavors each time and we have, when we travel, we have taken the kids to England and Hong Kong. My husband taught there so we had a month in Hong Kong.

Through this international student program and the traveling that the Boones have taken, Jessica and Josh have had the opportunity to interact with people from various places across the world, particularly from Asian countries like China and South Korea. While the interactions are short-lived since the college students move into their dorms, the children remember these interactions and these trips to new places. For instance, Jessica tells me what she remembers from going to Hong Kong:

> **Jessica:** I did get some strange looks when I was in Hong Kong just because I looked so different. They were like, "WHOA." Especially standing next to my dad. He is 6'3, partially bald with a beard. No men in Hong Kong have beards so he got stared at, so I just got stared at being next to him.
>
> **Maggie:** How did that feel?
>
> **Jessica:** It did feel very awkward at first, like am I wearing something funny? Do I have a lipstick stain or something? (giggling) Um, but after awhile, I thought, yeah we're just the outsiders here and there would be some British families but we were some of the only Americans. But it made me think about what it would be like to be here and look different. Like if a person from Hong Kong were here. You know?

Traveling to places like Hong Kong and having international students live in their house every summer for a few days are experiences that have provided Jessica and Josh with the perspective that the world is much larger than what they experience on a day-to-day basis. And, this appreciation for the larger world is important to Mr. and Mrs. Boone. The reason they travel and participate in this program is because they prioritize their children being exposed to international diversity.

Shifting away from international diversity, Mrs. Boone and I also discuss diversity in Petersfield. Mrs. Boone offers her thoughts on diversity in Petersfield:

> Here, you will have, because of the university, you will have a lot of people who have um intellectual degrees and you can't throw a stick around here without hitting a doctor or a social worker or someone at the university. So and as far as diversity? Ethnic diversity. I see more of it as….uh, a lot of influence by the university, bringing in the Chinese and a lot of Indian cultures and whatnot. Economically, if you think of diversity, you would think of the pockets of the black community like Hampton Court and some other areas.

Hampton Court is a neighborhood on the other side of town from Wheaton Hills that is understood by affluent whites as being the "projects" or the part of town where the poor blacks live in Section 8 housing. Wealthier community members perceive this part of town in very negative terms.[14] I probe Mrs. Boone on this point of "economic" and "ethnic" diversity. She explains her theory of diversity in Petersfield to me:

> I'd probably explain "diversity" in three different levels because people have at least three different categories of it. Race is the color of your skin that you have to check off on a paper. It's also your ethnic perspective to it and then, I think there is maybe even an unsaid economic component to it. Um, cuz in Petersfield – we lived in Chicago so we have that comparison and in Atlanta you probably have it much more than we do - uh, there's really not a strong, vibrant black middle class here in Petersfield. In Atlanta, you probably, it's so seamless, it's just a different color skin but they drive the same cars as everybody. Here, there is a GREAT disparity and um, I think that also plays in so in Petersfield, sometimes when you hear the buzz word of "diversity" – you can have diversity where you've got you know all the professors kids or all the graduate students' kids from Singapore and Lebanon or wherever and then you've got the "diversity" of Hampton Court, which is very different. So I think they are using euphemisms.

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[14] Some parents refuse to even send their children to one of the best "progressive" private schools in town that happens to be located in relatively close proximity to Hampton Court.

Mrs. Boone tells me that she thinks when whites in Petersfield talk about "diversity," they use it to refer to two very particular populations: the international students brought to this community because of the large university and the people of color who live in Petersfield and who are poor. As she states, her perspective is that the term "diversity" gets used as a racial euphemism so that members of the affluent white community do not have to use the word "race" or talk about the two different types of diversity present. Mrs. Boone explains to me that the international diversity is seen as positive while the poor families of color in town as seen as negative by many of her peers. "This plays out with the choices parents make about schools, which is unfortunate," she tells me. She goes on to share with me the common perceptions of the elementary school pairings—how Pairing A is seen in a positive light while Pairing B is seen in a negative one, the primary difference being the "kind" of diversity present in each school.[15] She tells me that she thinks if more parents stayed in Pairing B and interacted with the "bad" diversity, perhaps the school would improve. "But people don't want their children in that environment," she tells me, "even if they won't tell you that. No one wants to appear racist, but let's be honest about what's going on here."

Mrs. Boone is very much aware of the nuanced and strategic ways in which whites in her community talk about race, even when those conversations happen in racially coded ways or by drawing on euphemisms. She acknowledges the distance between her affluent white community and the impoverished neighborhoods on the other side of town. She translates for me what her peers *really* mean when they say particular things, and she is critical of the choices other parents make about the Pairing B situation. So too does Mrs. Boone believe that racism exists in America at large but also in her own local community and that changes in policies and practices

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[15] See Hayes chapter for more discussion of Pairing controversy.

need to occur to create a country and city that is more equal and racially just. Mrs. Boone is also committed to fairness and to "giving everyone an equal shot," as mentioned earlier. She cites employment discrimination, anti-Muslim sentiments following 9/11 that she noticed, and the incarceration rate of black men as evidence of the continued salience of race and existence of racism in America. She tells me that she wants to teach her children about the importance of fairness and instill in them the value of working to make the world a place where people can be both different and equal. Much of what she tells me maps on to the color-conscious values articulated by families living in Evergreen, like the Norton-Smiths.

However, despite these stated values and her critique of her white peers and her surrounding community, Mrs. Boone makes choices that result in her children never coming into contact with that second type of diversity in Petersfield—the impoverished black and Latino families. She and her husband avoid this segment of the population through the choices they make about where to live and where to send their children to school. Like the other families in this study, the Boone's choices about these two aspects of the racial context they construct, along with choices about extracurricular activities, kinds of social interactions, and travel (as discussed above), shape Jessica's lived experience of race as a white person in Petersfield and shape how she makes sense of race as a child. These choices also appear to conflict with the values that Mrs. Boone shares with me.

School Choice

Despite moving to Wheaton Hills "because of the good schools," this family has opted out of the public elementary and middle schools—though like many other families, they send Josh and will send Jessica to the public high school in Wheaton Hills. I ask Mrs. Boone about their elementary and middle school choices, particularly in light of Mrs. Boone's previous

comments about how private schools that cost money to attend are inherently "unfair" in comparison to public schools that are free to attend:

> **Mrs. Boone:** Um, well, um, we made the decision, um based on a religion component primarily. Second component is, it's two blocks from my house. And I fully believe the importance of of of grade school should be part of the community. You should be able to walk there. Kids shouldn't have to be transported and um, the way THIS neighborhood is, you would have to be bussed to the other side of town. Kindergarten, 1, 2 and 3, is three blocks from here and then you get bussed to the other side of town. TWENTY minutes on the [highway] for 4, 5, 6.
>
> **Maggie:** So what is the goal of the bussing?
>
> **Mrs. Boone:** Well, it was to integrate the, um, the, the blacks and the whites in other parts of town but people just fled this neighborhood and moved to suburbs like Sheridan. So, there was um, a quite a community drain of kids in this area because they didn't want to be bussed, you know 20 minutes away.
>
> **Maggie:** That's really interesting.
>
> **Mrs. Boone:** It's starting to come back now. Josh, he is the oldest one in the neighborhood and there are over 30 kids under him, you know, a baby there (pointing), a baby there (pointing to a different house), two babies there (pointing to yet another house), you know kind of thing. So, um this neighborhood is turning around, and um, we have, we are feeding into five different grade schools but I wonder if you were to survey [parents], if they were to make a choice, would they choose the grade school within four blocks of their house and you probably get them saying yes. But they say no because they don't want their kids bussed across town!
>
> **Maggie:** That's really interesting.

The Boones live in the Pairing B part of Wheaton Hills. And despite Mrs. Boone's open acknowledgement that commonsense racial logic exists in which Pairing A is equated with international students who are typically Asian while Pairing B is equated with black and Latino Americans who are impoverished, and despite her critical analysis of this commonsense logic, ironically, she does not reject it. In fact, she adopts this logic, at least when it comes to making choices about schools. And, adopting this logic means avoiding the children who attend Pairing B. In the end, despite all of her values about fairness and critique of her peers who opt out of public schools, her children attend the parochial school down the street.

This is an example of justified avoidance. Unlike her peers who she believes avoid Pairing B because of the racial composition of the schools, Mrs. Boone understands herself as avoiding this school pairing because she wants her children to go to school close to home, because she wants her children to attend a Catholic school, and because of the risk of the obesity epidemic—NOT because of the population that attends Pairing B. Drawing on socially acceptable explanations for opting out of the public schools—and specifically opting out of Pairing B since initially, the Boones moved to this neighborhood because of the public schools, not the close proximity to a Catholic school—Mrs. Boone justifies her avoidance of the population present in the Pairing B schools. This allows her to maintain accordance in her values and actions—she isn't opting out of the public schools because she is racist. She is opting out because she wants her children to go to Catholic school and fight the obesity epidemic by walking there—and this is very different from all the other whites around her that make similar choices because her choice, she believes, is not motivated by race unlike her peers.

Perhaps this argument that Mrs. Boone participates in justified avoidance is sharpest when I ask her about the population of students of color at Saint Anne's:

> It just so happens that in Jessica's class, she has the Nigerian and the Indian and a half native-American and then you've got all your Swedes and your Germans and they're all in there (laughing). Jessica is best friends with the Nigerian and what we're seeing is a TON of parental involvement from this child's parents! You know, this kid is BA-LACK. (pointing to her skin on her arm, implying that the child's skin is a very dark color). She's an African American, but her parents are first generation-well, they aren't even a generation, they are right from Nigeria and they know the importance of staying together and of education and their faith and they're conveying that to their kids. And they live somewhat close to Hampton Court…and honestly, I don't think [this family] even associate[s] with American blacks. Um, because the ideology is so different. There is more of an educational component. This child could blow the doors off of great grades and attention and preparedness. She's very bright! And her parents are great. It's very interesting.

Reading between the lines, Mrs. Boone does not want Jessica associating with the types of students who attend Pairing B and who live in the neighborhood across town—children whose

parents do not "stay together" or "conve[y] to their children" the values of education and faith. She does not mind if Jessica is best friends with a child whose parents relatively recently immigrated from Nigeria—in fact, she is excited about her daughter's friendship as she values having international diversity in Jessica's life, as exposure to international diversity is a priority of the Boone parents. Yet, at the same time, Mrs. Boone does not want to appear to be "one of those people" who avoids Pairing B because of the racial composition of the school (or rather, the *perceived* composition as discussed in the Hayes chapter). In order to maintain a positive image to herself and of herself to others, Mrs. Boone participates in justified avoidance, behaving in ways that do not seem to align with her values.

Additionally, Mrs. Boone shares further thoughts about the differences in what she calls "ideology" between blacks living in poverty and what she considers to be "educated blacks."

> I think we're trying to use old terms and are not able to identify the new ideology to it? I see the distinction more of as um, education. Because he's a black educated man and talks eloquently, nobody would think twice. If someone is speaking with a very thick—what is that? You-bonics? Or other ethnic, black language, I think that colors a person's perspective and then just the education level and how they carry themselves BUT if you have someone who is white and carrying themselves not eloquently, that would also categorize them and they would be comparable. So I think its more now toward your education and how you carry yourself as opposed to what color your skin is.

Mrs. Boone, while at moments recognizing racism as a central problem in American society, at other moments minimizes the significance of race and instead, the things that make people different are related more to class than race. If a black person is educated, like the parents of her daughter's friends, they are different in a meaningful way from someone who is black and impoverished, or "uneducated" as Mrs. Boone puts it. However, her thoughts on this matter shift over the course of the interview, and it is almost as if she is talking through her ideas for the first time as I interview her.

In addition to justified avoidance, Mrs. Boone also draws upon diversity discourse—she thinks of the international students who stay with the family as "flavors" and she tells me how enriching it is for her children to experience the culture and language and food of people around the world. She also expresses excitement that her white daughter is friends with the child with parents from Nigeria—not because of any specific qualities that this child possesses that would make her a good friend for Jessica—but because of where she is from—that having a black friend will provide Jessica with a sense of different culture—and importantly, "the Nigerian" will provide Jessica with a positive culture, not the culture or "ideology" of the "American black" kids who live across town in subsidized housing in Hampton Court.

Talking about Race

Part of a racial context of childhood includes the interactions that children have with their parents, not just interactions they have outside of the home environment. I ask Mrs. Boone if she talks to her children about race. Like many of the mothers I interviewed in Wheaton Hills, Mrs. Boone tells me that she defers to her husband to have these conversations.

> My husband Ryan is better at it than I am as far as talking about the history of Martin Luther King, and what he stood for and Ryan is much better at talking about the economic injustices and cultural diversity and things like that than I am. But he will, um one little question the kids ask and he will go off talking until the kids' eyes glaze over (laughing) so to THAT kind of degree, he will address race.

Aside from talking about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and economic injustice, Mrs. Boone talks to the kids about race most often when the children bring up an incident from school. For example, one day, Josh comes home from school after getting into a scuffle in the hallway with a peer. Josh explains that someone came up to him in the hallway and aggressively told him to give him his money. When Josh told the other boy that he did not have any money, the boy ran off. In retelling what happened, Josh does not mention the race of the other child. Mrs. Boone waits for him to finish and then asks him if he knew the person who did this. Josh says, "no."

Then Mrs. Boone asks Josh to describe the boy. Josh thinks for a moment and then decides that the boy was Latino. Mrs. Boone asks Josh if he thinks the boy was in a gang. Josh says he doesn't know and then leave to go do his homework. Later, Mrs. Boone tells me that she was very surprised that Josh didn't bring up the race of the boy who stopped him in the hallway and that if he was Latino, he probably was in a gang and Josh is just "too oblivious" to realize that fact. In this example, Mrs. Boone is talking about race with her son after Josh brings up an incident that happened at school. Unlike other examples found across my data of kids bringing up race in explicit terms to their parents, Mrs. Boone is the one who inserts race and racial meaning into this encounter rather than Josh himself. Mrs. Boone assumes that this Latino child is in a gang without having really any other factual knowledge to go off of and she shares her perception with her children. Her actions therefore convey ideas about who is in a gang and who tries to steal money from other kids at school to Josh and Jessica, and it is up to them to interpret this message for themselves.

Overall, the racial context of childhood that Mr. and Mrs. Boone have constructed for Josh and Jessica contains color-conscious values and racial logic, like parents in Evergreen, but also includes parenting choices that map more closely onto the views of color-blind parents, like those in Sheridan. In fact, many of the children who attend Saint Anne's are from Sheridan. Therefore, the kids that Jessica interacts with are not the same children that she would meet at Pairing B. And the primary differences between these interactions are connected to race and class.

Thus, there is a seeming disjuncture between the values or ideological position held by the Boone parents and the actions that they take with respect to parenting. The combination of promoting color-conscious ideas about fairness, injustice, and the value of "international

diversity" while at the same time opting out of public schools for reasons that seem to be connected to race (beneath the surface) or bad kind of diversity, living in a predominantly white neighborhood, traveling to experience the good kind of diversity, and belonging to a dance school that is almost exclusively white shapes the way that chirpy, eleven-year-old Jessica experiences and makes sense of race.

Jessica on Race

> **Maggie:** If a little kid asked you, "What does race mean?" how would you explain it?
>
> **Jessica:** I would kind of say, where you come from and just, I dunno, just in general, who you are as a person instead of who you are just by your features, you know? But I would say that yeah, it's just part of who you are, of where you come from, of what color skin you are or kind of ears you have or what kind of hair you have, so.
>
> **Maggie:** What would you say your race is? Like how do you think about yourself?
>
> **Jessica:** Awesome, of course.
>
> **Maggie:** Of course! (laughing)
>
> **Jessica:** Totally humble. (laughing)
>
> **Maggie:** You're funny. (laughing)
>
> **Jessica:** Um, okay seriously, I would say…Basic European. Irish. I'm mainly Irish. I love my Irish part. We really celebrate Saint Patrick's Day. I'm very excited. It's next weekend!

Jessica understands herself racially as being "basic European." I ask her what she means by that. She tells me confidently, "Irish, German, Polish." When I ask her about the races of the people who live in her neighborhood, she tells me that they are "for the most part, they're all white. I think they are all white, yeah." I ask her if there is a difference between "basic European" and "white" and she tells me, "well white people come from other places too but those are the most basic places they come from. And England I guess too like the Pilgrims." I ask her about the kids at school—what are the races of the kids in her class? She responds:

> Um, overall my school, I think it is, it is a lot more white just European. Different hair colors of course, but they'll be the one or two families that have like the dark skin and um a couple who are

> Indian and in my class alone, two of my best friends, she's African American um her brother, her mom and her dad were all born in Nigeria in Africa but she was born in America um and her grandmother lives with her and my other friend, she was born and lived in India until she was three and um, she lives with both her grandparents and her parents so I think they have a lot closer families that we (pointing at me and herself) do um and I think because they came here together, they decided to stick together more um and my Indian friend, their parents have these BIG INDIAN PHDS and all that and they had to come here and start totally over.

Both of Jessica's closest friends are, in Jessica's mind, connected to another country or part of the world and as a result of immigrating here, have very close intergenerational families that live in the same home. This is different than Jessica's family, but she views this in a positive light, that "they have a lot closer families than we do," "we" indicating people like myself and Jessica, drawing a distinction between who she perceives to be "basic Europeans" and people from places like Nigeria and India. She points out the "BIG INDIAN PHDS" in a mocking tone, almost as if she has heard adults in her life refer to this concept in a somewhat negative light, although she does not elaborate on the point. It is certainly not stated in a way that indicates that she is impressed or proud of her friend for having parents with PhDs from India.

Jessica and her friends do not often talk openly about race with one another, though Jessica often thinks to herself about the differences between them. She also wonders how her friends, particularly the black child, interprets various events that occur around her:

> I just kind of –we read the book *Sounder* at school and that has the N-word in it and just got—and we had to talk about the racial barriers in the story and the Civil War and all that um so I think they just kind of, you know, they didn't feel like total outsider, shut out. I think they just kind of felt a little bit more awkward in that situation especially my African American friend um just because I mean she knows that that's out there but she knows that none of her friends would ever do that. I HOPE she knows that!

Sounder, a young adult novel about a black sharecropper family, was read at school and the class discussed the book. While Jessica never spoke openly to her friend about how she felt when the class was talking about black sharecropper families, Jessica was worried that her friend felt "a little bit more awkward" or like a "total outsider." While Jessica never said anything to her

friend, she confides in me that she was worried about her friend and that she hoped her friend

knew that Jessica wouldn't call her the n-word or shut her out. We continue talking:

> **Maggie:** Do you guys ever talk very openly about how you're white and she's black?
>
> **Jessica:** Not really. I mean we talk about how she's so lucky because her hair is like so much more, like the texture, it just looks so (in a "fancy" voice) cool and different, you know? And she can do more spikey type hairstyles where mine is like, just kind of there (laughing). But, I dunno. We just—we never really talk about how bad the skin tone is or anything like that, but um, head lice was going around—
>
> **Maggie:** Oh no!
>
> **Jessica:** YEAH (with disgust) And, um she can't get head lice because her hair is textured and they can't stay on so I was like, "ugh, you're soooo lucky" I'm like wearing my hair in a tight pony tail or a bun or something like that to keep it all up.
>
> **Maggie:** I forgot about head lice. Oh man!

Jessica is very candid about how she wishes her hair was "cool and different" and how she could

"do more spikey type hairstyles" and how she hated wearing her hair in a bun during the head

lice outbreak, but she also references "bad" skin tone. While in the midst of the interview, I

thought Jessica said how "black" the skin tone is, but after listening to the recording multiple

times, I realized that she said how "bad" the skin tone is—presumably referring to how dark her

friend is in comparison to her light peach colored skin. It seems that while Jessica is envious of

her friend's hair, she is not so envious of her friend's skin. We also talk about the names of her

friends:

> **Maggie:** So, who are your three best friends, like, if you had to pick, who are your THREE favorite friends?
>
> **Jessica:** Um, Sarah Snyder, I've known her all my life cuz our parents knew each other in college. She is Irish and she's a classic European. And then I'd have to say, Betty Gobena—isn't that fun to say? Betty Gobena? She is the African American and Sabeena Rand who is the Indian. Her dad's name is Rand so she does that Indian tradition of taking her dad's first name as her last name. Or else—or, she decided to do that and change it because she has some other crazy Indian name that is hard to pronounce. And her middle name is Apoorva. Apooooo-rvaaa! (in silly voice) How cool is that?

Jessica likes saying her friends' names because they are "fun" and "cool" and "different." She especially likes Sabeena's last name because it isn't "some other crazy Indian name" that would be hard to pronounce. Jessica continues telling me about her friends—the things they do together, how they run middle school track together, and basketball. Jessica loves sports, but she also loves world geography and traveling she tells me. "I have been to a lot of places," she tells me. "I just like learning about other cultures." She has a lot to say about her trip to Hong Kong and how that made her think about what it means to be an outsider in a particular place. Jessica in general seems very focused on "insiders" and "outsiders"—especially in terms of her experiences at school. She does not want her black friend to feel like an "outsider" but she also understands that the possibility for her friend to feel that way exists and may even be a reality.

Jessica also notices differences between Betty and Sabeena:

> My African American friend, she lives in a—I've never actually been in her house—but I've seen it dropping her off from play dates and stuff. She's got a one story, small, like small house. ..And, she says that they are always a close family and she, she enjoys having the African food at home because it just, you know, she likes being a part of her um history, like where she came from um but I think the parents had to choose there because they were coming to this country and they just had to have some place where their kids could stay and just be a close family and then become Americans. And um, my Indian friend, she also, she only lives a couple blocks from here, she lives in a one-story small house and um, she says that, you know, she enjoys Indian food, because we talk about food a lot because we like food, um, and she enjoys that but um just what I've noticed. She likes to be more of an American than really talking about her Indian culture and doing all that stuff. Betty is more interested in her history it seems like than Sabeena.

Jessica is curious about these differences she notices in her friends, but she tells me that she doesn't really bring this observations up to her friends because she doesn't want to be rude or make her friends feel uncomfortable. But, she does notice these similarities and differences and thinks a lot about why it might be that, for instance, Sabeena seems to distance herself from her Indian cultural background in comparison to Betty who embraces her cultural background more, at least as far as Jessica can tell. Overall, Jessica interacts frequently with peers who have different ethnic backgrounds and identify as belonging to different racial categories. While the

girls do not appear to talk a lot about their differences, it is clear that Jessica thinks about the

differences between them a lot—particularly in terms of hair and food. Jessica enjoys having

friends who are different from most of the other kids at school because it is more interesting and

she thinks it is cool. And while she does exhibit concern for Betty while her class was reading

Sounder, it is the only mention that Jessica makes of worrying about her friends being mistreated

or being discriminated against. And, Jessica's knowledge of structural racism is very limited,

particularly because much of what she learns about race at school is put into an historical context

while contemporary racial disparities are avoided.

America and Race

While we discuss international travel and the differences between her family and her two

friends' families, we also talk exclusively about America. For instance, we discuss the

differences between schools:

> **Maggie:** Do you think there are some schools that are better than other schools in the USA?
>
> **Jessica:** Um, teacher-wise?
>
> **Maggie:** Just in general, whatever you think would make them better or worse.
>
> **Jessica:** Um, I kind of think so. I think a better school would have good, clean facilities and I dunno, good control over the students not just the running everywhere. Um, good food! (laughing) I'm not really one for ridiculously long recesses. I'd rather have one really long recess than a bunch of short ones. Some days. And then some days, I want just a lot of them—it feels like those days are endless. And…it doesn't really matter what kind of students go to the school, as long as they don't care, I mean they care about having a social life, but they really, if they are the students who want to get an, uh, education, I think that would make a good school.
>
> **Maggie:** So, let's just say there are some schools that don't have clean facilities, do you think it's fair that some kids go to those schools and then other kids go to better schools?
>
> **Jessica:** Um, I think it is…..it's gotta be kinda unfair, but then there are the reasons about why that school is better is because people um, care about it and they'll…I dunno, the school. I think it is unfair because these students could have just the—just the same amount of a bright future as any other students in that good school but they probably would have, be a little bit more scared of going to school because of the fear of the bad facilities and crazy students stopping them from learning and the teachers always having to control them. So, I think yeah it would be unfair.

> **Maggie:** Are there differences do you think in who goes to the good schools and the schools with bad facilities?

> **Jessica:** Well, I think it is probably African-Americans who um go to the worse schools more. I don't really know why but that's just what comes into my head.

Based on her comments, it appears that while Jessica does not think schools should be unequal, there are some differences in terms of why they are unequal. These reasons include: people caring or not caring about the school, bad dirty facilities, out of control "crazy" students, and teachers focused on the bad kids rather than the ones that "want" an education. The kids who go to these schools, though she can't explain why, are African-American mostly. The comment that this idea just "came into her head" speaks to the implicit messages about race Jessica has mostly likely received over time. These messages are conveyed at a level so subtle that she can't even identify why she holds this particular belief. Jessica does not talk about school funding or property taxes or how private schools are unequal. Rather, the focus is on the people who are affiliated with the bad school. Interestingly, however, when I ask her if she thinks anyone can go to college, Jessica tells me that "not everyone can afford it" and that that isn't fair because "you might be the next Einstein but your parents don't have a lot of money and then you don't get to go to college," citing economic inequality as a problem for kids trying to get an education.

We also talk about what she learns at school. I ask her if she has heard the word 'prejudice' and she laughs, informing me that this was one of her spelling words that week. She is very excited to tell me how to spell it and what it means:

> **Jessica:** I'm sorry (laughing) it's just that "prejudice" is one of our spelling words this week!! It was the challenge words and "prejudice" was one of them and some people were like, "What does being prejudice mean?" and um, Mrs. M.L. my teacher, she was talking about if you're walking at the mall with a couple of friends and what kind of, like if you see a fat person, um, being prejudice is saying like, "Oh, they eat too much" or "Oh, they have bad bodies" or just judging somebody, and um, I could see how somebody, um I don't see how people could just get um get should be totally prejudice just about the color of their skin. I kind of get a little freaked out by people who have a TATTOOS up on their arms and piercings everywhere or uh, unnaturally neon-y, spiked, hair. Um, just that or er those spike bracelets, kinda like goth-tattooey

look, that just kind of makes me a LITTLE bit iffy and I kind of stand a little bit closer to my friends, but um, yeah for the most part. Yeah we talk about those.

Jessica's teacher used body weight as the example of how prejudice might operate in a setting like the mall. Jessica, however, puts this term in the context of skin color, though she only mentions this briefly. Instead, she focuses on telling me about the "goth-tattooey" people and how they frighten her She recognizes her behavior as being prejudice but in this case, does not appear particularly apologetic about it. I ask her what else they talk about at school:

> **Maggie:** What about race? Do you ever talk specifically about race at school? Or racism?
>
> **Jessica:** In social studies, we were talking about immigration. And how the Chinese and Irish immigrants would get the bad jobs that no US citizen born person would take um we talked about that, but not, and we're going to talk more about slavery and she keeps on stressing that that was one of our worst times in history um yeah. That's about it though. Mostly history.

Jessica's report about what she has learned about at school with respect to race is more sophisticated and detailed than what Sheridan children tell me, including Sheridan children that attend the same school as Jessica. Of course differences surely exist between what different kids remember learning about at school, but it is telling that Jessica, growing up in a family that talks about race, though often in complicated ways, can recite more about the history lessons about race than her peers who have similar school experiences. She is also friends with two of the only children of color at her school, the three of them forming a tripod peer group. Jessica seems to pay closer attention to race and human difference, both in terms of the history lessons she receives on this topic as well as in terms of who she befriends. It is clear, however, that much of what is discussed at school is in historical terms. Unlike the TAG school that the Hayes children attend, the curriculum is certainly not focused on current events or how social injustice exists today. Instead, much of the focus appears to be on the past rather than the present.

We also discuss school discipline and race:

Maggie: Some people say black kids get in trouble more than white kids in school. Have you ever seen that at your school?

Jessica: Um not at our school. But I've got neighbors who go to the public school and I can just imagine that they might just because that's their background, that just might be the kids in their neighborhood rough-housing a little bit too harsh, or harshly or something like that? So that's just what they know. But then the teachers don't like it.

Maggie: So there are some neighborhoods where the kids rough-house more and then they go to school and do it and get in trouble? That kind of thing?

Jessica: Yeah, if they just see it, they're thinking yeah those are my people, those are my skin color. Maybe they just, that's just who we are and how we act. But that's not who people are supposed to be. But they just think it.

Jessica draws on commonsense knowledge that she possesses to explain why she believes black children may get in trouble more than white children at the public school she would have attended if she had not gone to private school. She seems to suggest that when black children see other black children rough-housing, they think that this is how all black children are and so they then rough-house, even if that isn't who they are. And, as Jessica indicates, this is not how anyone is "supposed to be." She does express some degree of sympathy when she states that the teachers don't like the rough-housing, but the rough-housing is all the black children know about interacting with one another. She seems to be getting at an idea of bias on the behalf of white teachers, misinterpreting the behavior of particular children based on expectations of how one ought to behave.

In the context of this discussion about rough-housing, Jessica exerts agency within the structure of the interview and asks me if she can "make a note":

Jessica: So. Can I just make a note?

Maggie: Yes!

Jessica: Our school isn't fully di-VERSE, but it's not totally white and um all of our teachers are mainly a white woman. We have a black computer teacher um but other than that we have a few lunch ladies who are black and a guy who is black—he's actually really nice but, so I dunno why but I just thought that was a good point to tell you about.

It is unclear as to why Jessica wanted to share this information, but clearly she wanted me to know that there are a few black adults at her school despite most of the teachers being white. In this moment, Jessica used the word "diverse" precisely how scholars like Hartmann and Bell discuss—to stand in for race. And, in particular, "diverse" to Jessica is about whites and blacks primarily. It is also interesting that the one black man at her school is "actually really nice" as opposed to just being "really nice'—it is as if Jessica is surprised to discover that he is nice.

Jessica is not wrong to comment on the prevalence of white women working at Saint Anne's. I babysat another child who attended this school and picked him up in the parking lot. Here is an excerpt from my field notes about this particular space:

> **Field notes from February 11, 2011**
> Today was the usual pickup of the kids. I navigated the busy parking lot filled with huge SUVs and minivans and found a spot near a giant pile of snow. Because it was a little warmer, I got out of my car a few minutes earlier along with many other parents. I was standing in a sea of white people. I did not see one person that did not appear to be white. White parents, white grandparents, white police officers directing traffic, white staff, and many, many white children. I also noticed today that the women generally look the same. Many of them had on black winter jackets—some peacoats must mostly big warm coats from places like North Face—dark boot cut jeans, and black shoes or boots with a small chunky heel. They all seemed to be "done up"—in fact, I watched as one applied her lipstick before exiting her car to go stand in the cold to wait for her kids to come out the doors. Today, they were gathered in clusters and there was a more jovial feel to the place. The Valentine's Day classroom parties will be on Monday an I overheard parents groaning about what to bring in and wondering if they were on "the list" to bring something. It is obvious that some parents are more friendly with each other. I have been unable to identify any solid cliques, but there are definitely parents who chat more with one another. Also, everyone seems to know each other, but not entirely because I haven't received any strange looks or anything—I guess it is more that most people know most other people. A few moms said hi to me today, which was unusual. When the bell rang, the kids ran out of the school followed by a mass of white teachers and staff. The kids were more reluctant to run to their parents today, perhaps because it was warmer. I noticed four girls standing in a huddle with their heads all mashed together, keeping everyone else out. Kids were wearing lots of pink today in preparation for Valentine's Day. The boys were throwing snowballs and everyone was yelling. The little kids ran in their big snowpants and snow boots while the older kids stood around talking. Parents ushered the kids to them, though they also seemed to linger a bit more. I only saw a few Asian students and two black children. Everyone else—kids, adults, teachers—was white.

While these notes come from my time spent at this school with a different family in my study, Jessica's own observations about the racial makeup of the adults at her school resonates with my

observations in the parking lot for a period of five months watching parents and kids interact

with one another.

Perspectives on Social Class

Jessica and I also talk about wealth inequality in the United States and how race connects

to this:

> **Maggie:** So in your opinion, how does somebody become rich?
>
> **Jessica:** Um, either they inherit a whole load of money or, or they just work hard and get up there and get their big break and are like whew! And then they keep working.
>
> **Maggie:** Do you think anybody can become rich?
>
> **Jessica:** Yeah. I think they could but I mean, being a like a working at a fast food restaurant. I mean that's a place for teenagers, you've got to start some place just so you've got some kind of money coming in, or just a bagger, um you gotta start someplace because you can't just sell lemonade for the rest of your life. You gotta get some kind of background of working this amount of hours for this amount of pay. Um, but I think there are some, I think, um, different, what are they? Subjects. Can get you farther in life than other subjects. Like food, unless you get on one of those Top Chef shows, and just get money off of that, I think that um you'd have to work, it wouldn't just pay off as quickly as if you were like um technology and just think of this new technology cuz you'd have to work for this new restaurant or this new recipe and then you'd have to get the recipe out to everybody. With technology you – oh that's my brother coming in – you can just make your big break of this new software and then just email it to everybody and then instantly all those people have it and are like hey! Check this out! And they give it to so many other people, um a recipe, like getting out food, takes a lot longer to really get your big break on that star magazine review. So.
>
> **Maggie:** Yeah, let's shift away from food a little bit, I love those shows though.
>
> **Jessica:** Yeah! Me too. They are like "fry that!" (in silly voice)
>
> **Maggie:** Yeah, so what about poor people, how do you think people become poor or why are they poor?
>
> **Jessica:** Um, they spend their money unwisely. Um on things that you don't need and will never do anything for you unless maybe entertain you for a couple minutes. Um, or if they just start out on the poorer side and they just decide, oh I'm just going to live like this the rest of my life. Ughhh. And they just don't decide to think, "hey, I'm going to give that effort and maybe I'll get at least middle class or something out of it" The more comfortable life.
>
> **Maggie:** So, do you think that it's fair that some people inherit a whole bunch of money and some people don't inherit a whole bunch of money?
>
> **Jessica:** Um, I think it's kind of unfair how they inherit the whole thing. I would say that overall, if they're going to inherit this thousand dollars, they should only get about half of it just because

they can't live off of someone else's hard work and blood and sweat I mean, I think the person died or inherits it to them would either just want them to inherit the whole thing and become that business person and just automatically get from the bottom to the top because of your dad or whatever, if he's at the top. I think they should um teach their sons or daughters that I'm going to give you this much and just, the closer the one to the top, my head guy, the head, like you'll be next and you just have to work, and then it will switch and you will be at the top. Yeah.

Here, Jessica seems to adhere to both meritocratic ideology (work hard and personal strength of character allow one to achieve upward social mobility) as well as an ideological perspective that includes luck, intergenerational transfers of wealth, and being on a famous television show in order to explain why the rich are rich and the poor are poor. We go on to discuss what comes to mind when she thinks of a poor person:

> **Jessica:** Um, I'd have to say they wouldn't have the best hygiene or wouldn't be the cleanliest. They'd just be like have messy hair, like kind of like mine (laughing), um or they'd have the little extra torn dress that somebody in our class or above wouldn't really wear out in public with such a big tear or rip, um faded clothes or I dunno, mismatching socks or something like that…Unfortunately, I also think they do kind of because you kind of think of poor and there are more African American poor than there are white people poor. Um, then again, there are also people of a different race like Hispanic who are making millions up there like George Lopez, I mean, he's pretty up there. Um.
>
> **Maggie:** Why do you think it is that there are more African American poor than white poor?
>
> **Jessica:** Um….I don't really know. It might be how they just think, "Oh yeah, this is just where we're stuck. There really is no point." Or they might just think, "Not gunna. Just too cool. Nah brother" or something like that. And then the inheritance thing. Whites have more money.

When Jessica makes these final statements and says phrases like "not gunna", she sticks out her upper lip with a slight pucker in her mouth and raises her right arm in the air straight in front of her, bending her arm at the elbow, points her two fingers down at the ground and slumps her body back in her chair while she puts one leg forward, then motions with her hands. I can tell by what she is doing that she is attempting to imitate what she perceives to be a black person. When she is done, I ask her what she meant when she motioned her hands like that. She tells me with a giggle, "I dunno. I was being like a rapper!" Jessica brings up George Lopez as an exception to

what she believes is the rule—that there are more people of color who are living in poverty than white people. On the one hand, her explanation of this is cultural—that rather than working hard and getting into college, black people just decide that they are "not gunna" try. On the other hand, Jessica believes that inheriting wealth without doing anything to earn it is unfair in that white people, for instance, receive unearned advantages.

Talking about Race at Home

While Jessica tells me many stories about things she has learned at school with respect to race, or observations she has made there of the people around her, she also tells me that she talks about race at home with her family.

> Oh yeah!!! We talk about it a lot. Just kind of, just kind of like are people getting treated fairly and that kind of thing? What was I going to say? Yeah for the most part, we talk about it. I mean, not when it's totally out of the blue. But I mean, if it's related to something going on, like why is Barack Obama so amazing coming in? I mean, I know it's like to be a big break for American and we're supposed to get out of the debt, which is, it's getting there, um but why is he such a big deal? You know, they explained, yeah this is the first African American president and you know, it just shows that American is….mixed. (moving hands together)

Jessica also tells me that her dad talks to her about discrimination and other forms of racism. "He talks a LOT about it," she tells me.

I also notice that Josh makes mention of race in the presence of his sister, which demonstrates that siblings also play an influential role in the white racial socialization of younger siblings. Josh attends Wheaton Hills High School and was at the school during the TAG debacle.[16] He describes his perspective on the matter:

> They're trying to change the classes so you have two, like the higher for smarter kids and lower for like kinda the tracked kids who are minorities usually. And, that would get rid of a lot of Wheaton Hill's like extracurricular stuff and some of the more electives that we have. So we had uh kind of a sit-out outside of the school for uh, like I dunno, maybe around 700 people just sat out on the main steps of Wheaton Hills. A couple tv stations came and we got in the paper for that. And it's didn't work. They are going to change it.

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[16] See Hayes chapter.

I ask Josh how he feels about this. He tells me that he thinks it is wrong and that he is against it. Just then, Jessica pipes up. "I think it is wrong too!" she states emphatically. I ask her why and she tells me that she doesn't really know but that she thinks it is wrong. Josh lectures her about how she "just wants to be cool" and Jessica tells him to go away. He leaves, rolling his eyes at his little sister who scowls at him. What this interaction illustrates is that conversations about race that happen in the home do not happen simply between parents and children. These dialogues also happen amongst siblings, as I have described in other chapters of this dissertation.

After her brother annoys her, Jessica thinks up one final point that she thinks I need to know:

> My friend Sabeena is pretty excited because soon she's going to take her US citizens test. And um, I kinda think that some Americans, like teenage boys (glaring in the direction her brother just took off) in particular, um, if they tried to take the US Citizens test, they would probably wouldn't do as well as people coming from a different country, really studying to make sure that they can become a US citizen. I think that would be pretty cool, giving out those US Citizen tests to citizens,, like teenage boys to see how they would do.

Jessica is aware of the United States citizenship test and how challenging it is or it would be for many Americans because she knows someone who is in the process of studying to take the test. Her knowledge of this process is far different than her peers in Sheridan who are likely unaware that such a test exists and different from her peers in Evergreen like Conor who can ramble off an entire critique of the US government's approach to immigration policy.

Conclusions

Mr. and Mrs. Boone have made choices that lead to their daughter Jessica growing up in a racial context of childhood in which she only comes into contact with people of color who are of the same or similar education and class status as her family—minorities who share a similar "ideology" (valuing education, being religious, being married) with the Boones, as Mrs. Boone puts it multiple times. Through their participation in justified avoidance, these parents have

developed rationales for why their kids cannot attend the schools in town that serve black and brown kids who are poor. Drawing on the obesity epidemic, the need for a Catholic education (despite initially moving to this neighborhood because of the good public schools affiliated with it), and the desire to send their kids to a neighborhood school within walking distance to their home, the Boone's can avoid this segment of the Petersfield population but in a way that is justifiable—that is, a way that is understood as socially acceptable by their white, highly educated, upper-middle-class peers.

However, the Boone's also explicitly work to make their children aware of the world beyond the United States borders. Through traveling, involvement in the international students program, and encouraging their kids to be friends with kids from other parts of the world, a large piece of the white racial socialization of kids like Jessica includes this international dimension of diversity—"good diversity" as Mrs. Boone puts it. As a result of having the opportunity to interact in a number of different types of spaces with all different people, Jessica appears to be open-minded and thoughtful about the experiences of others as they go through their lives. Jessica recognizes the way that race matters in people's lives, and she tries her best to make sense of the world in a way that gives people the benefit of the doubt rather than judging them. It is striking that the moments when Jessica provides interpretations of the world that are perhaps the most stereotypical or uncritical, she doesn't really know where these ideas come from. And while Jessica knows a lot about cultural differences between people form different parts of the world, she knows very little about structural racism in the United States. She has a sense that people are sometimes discriminated against, and she worries about how her black friend will react to class discussions about the history of race. And while she also has a sense that racism still exists, she is unable to provide concrete examples of racism like her peers in Evergreen, and

even some of her peers in Wheaton Hills who have an abstract sense of racism. Thus, Jessica knows a lot about and cares a lot about "international diversity" including different types of hair, foods, names, and customs. However, this multiculturalism is shallow in that she is not aware of the circumstances of Nigeria or India, for instance, or really of the kinds of race-based suffering that goes on in the United States. As a result of the choices her parents have made about where to live, where to travel, what schools to attend, and what friendships to help cultivate, Jessica has a very strong interest in different cultures and celebrates diversity—though the "good" kind—and has a very limited sense of the reality of race in America beyond an uncritical diversity discourse.

CHAPTER 12: The Palmer-Ross Family—Changes Over Time in One Family

The Palmer-Ross family lives on a quiet, tree-lined cul-de-sac in the neighborhood of Wheaton Hills. Their home is an unassuming brick Cape with a big backyard filled with random soccer balls, baseballs, and the occasional art project drying or science experiment equipment on the picnic table on the back deck, which was built by Mr. Palmer. The Palmer-Ross family does not care much about social class appearances and having three rowdy boys does not, as Gail Ross jokes with me, make her want to invest in anything "nice" in the home as it will just get destroyed. The family does have artifacts from their world travels displayed in the home in safe places, which the boys treasure and therefore try to avoid while they are playing and bouncing around the house. The three boys—ages 14, 10 and 5 at the time of data collection— are all very active, constantly moving, chasing each other, shouting and rough-housing with each other. They are also each incredibly sweet children in their own ways, all having a soft spot for animals especially their one-eyed cat, Ralphy and their big white and gray cat named Billy who they love. Billy is famous for murdering bunnies in his youth, which the 5 year old loves to brag to me about, although now Billy sits around the house snoozing or hoping for more food, Gail joking about his growing size.

All three children are involved in numerous organized activities including indoor and outdoor soccer, hockey, little league, Boy Scouts, cross-country, track, etc.. The kids also play instruments, take private language lessons, play video games, and read on their Kindles. They each excel at school and are popular kids, so homework, school projects, science experiments and getting together with friends are all part of their jam-packed lives. George, the eldest child, "is a very socially confident, adaptable kid" as his mother tells me, who is "usually trying to manipulate things to his own advantage (laughing)…I can usually look at George and I kind of

know what the wheels are turning and generally where he is going with things." George has

blonde hair and blue eyes and is an excellent student and athlete. He enjoys making people laugh

and is clearly a favorite student of his teachers and quite popular within his peer group. He is

also very accomplished in his extracurriculars. George is confident in himself and is the kind of

kid who attracts all the attention in a room when he enters it. His family members gently tease

him about his confidence, especially Gail.

Darren, the middle child, is more reserved than his older brother, paying close attention

to everything people say and analyzing in great detail social scenarios and interactions. While

Gail thought Darren would turn out to be more politically conservative than George, she tells me

that she has noticed that he is actually moving in the opposite direction as he gets older, growing

more impassioned by what he perceives are social injustices:

> I'm really pleased with him and how he's coming along. I mean, I feel like he's always been my
> kid who I don't read as well as I read George. And so, a lot of times, I don't know what is going
> on in his head…he's kind of my more opaque kid. And I'm really proud of how he's sort of
> stepping up and was willing to say, these are my politics, and I think this is wrong. Even when he
> was kind of surrounded by people who thought the governor's agenda was terrific and you know,
> that shows a character that I'm really glad is there…now, he has a little bit of an explosive temper
> that we have to work on a bit (laughing)

Darren has a very deep sense of fairness and justice, refusing to eat animals because of their

treatment by factory farms and purposely wearing political buttons and shirts to school that he

knows will irritate his politically conservative peers. After the death of Trayvon Martin, and the

Zimmerman trial, Darren was filled with pure outrage at what he perceived as a "travesty to

justice" (as described by his mother) in the court's view of Zimmerman's innocence. Similarly,

Darren had strong emotional reactions to the happenings of local and state politics, especially

surrounding union rights and collective bargaining. Darren was also upset after Troy Davis was

killed by the state of Georgia. He had talked to his mom about the case and told me that he

wished he could go to the candle-light vigil being held downtown in protest of the death penalty

after seeing candles in my car purchased for the event. Darren was also appalled by the reactions of his peers when Osama bin Laden was assassinated. I picked him up from school that day, and he looked at me after slamming the car door behind him with anger in his voice and said, "Maggie, I cannot believe everyone is CELEBRATING this? That is just sick. And you should have heard all the racist things people were saying today about Muslims." Darren changed schools during the period of my data collection in part because of his frustration attending a private school filled with what he calls, "rich, white, clueless snobs." This choice by his parents was made after they recognized that Darren was unhappy at Saint Anne's, the school also attended by Jessica Boone.

Finally, Noah, the youngest child is a playful, silly and very outspoken kid. While Noah and Darren argue a lot, Noah adores his big teenage brother George and thinks "he's really cool." George is very sweet to Noah, though often condescending and dismissive of Darren. As such, Darren is sometimes very angry with his brothers, as they certainly know how to push his buttons and seem to get enjoyment out of his emotional outbursts of frustration as siblings often do. Darren frequently stomps off to his room and slams the door in rage with the latest episode of sibling rivalry.

Neighborhood and School Choice

The Palmer-Ross family moved to Wheaton Hills from a different neighborhood in town because the neighborhood they had been living in previously was growing increasingly more volatile with gunshots being fired at night and kids stealing things from their backyard. In addition, Wheaton Hills is within walking and biking distance of the university's medical center and multiple research laboratories, which is ideal for many health and science professionals, such as Dr. Michael Palmer who is a leading expert in the medical field and who walks to work every

day. Michael also travels frequently for his work, attending conferences all over the world and meeting with collaborators on his various different research projects. Michael gets up at 4am every morning to run for an hour before work to help manage his stress, and he can be found helping George with his physics homework in the evenings or returning to his own work. Overall, moving to this neighborhood was a matter of convenience, nostalgia, and good schools for the Palmer-Ross family.

Wheaton Hills also attracts individuals who work downtown, including those who work in state government, like Ms. Ross, who is an attorney, or who hold their own private law, psychology, or dental practices. Being able to conveniently drop by the 5pm soccer game after work to meet up with the afterschool babysitter is important to Gail, a very attractive and quick-witted woman with strawberry blonde hair, as she really feels the tug between her career responsibilities and her family. Gail balances an enormous and stressful professional workload with parenting duties and work in the home. Gail attempts to build in exercise time for herself, but is often juggling the extra-curricular activities of her three active sons and the pressures of her intense job in state politics. Gail's sense of humor, feistiness, and intellect along with her drive to understand both sides of any argument and talk openly about the argument make her both an animated and thoughtful person. She follows the news carefully and is very well-informed about politics, law, and current events. Most of the media consumed by the family comes in the form of NPR, the Wall Street Journal, online news sources, and PBS. The television is in the basement, however, so it is not a primary source of news. Gail tells me that she mainly uses it for information about tornado warnings and watches and winter weather school cancelations. The family also watches political debates when they are broadcast. The kids are the primary users of the television. They use it a lot for playing video games together after school

like Mario Brothers or watching programs on Netflix. Rarely do I ever observe the children

watching live television, perhaps the only exception being sporting events.

As discussed in the previous chapters, particularly Chapter 9, parents in Wheaton Hills

are known for placing a great deal of emphasis on academic achievement. Children in this

neighborhood are expected to excel in school, to score highly on standardized tests, to be the star

athlete or musician, and to get into the most prestigious college with the best merit-based

scholarship award. As such, school choice is a major point of conversation in Wheaton Hills.

Gail describes her perceptions of her own block:

> Within our neighborhood, it's kind of interesting. Kids go all over the place. We have a handful
> of kids who go to the public elementary schools that are paired with each other. We have a
> handful of kids who "open enroll" into [other public schools], which are geographically about as
> close. And then, we have kids who go the private Catholic school and then the Catholic high
> school. And then the TAG school. And then this other private school. I mean, people are kind of
> all over the place.

Given what I know from other parents about the school pairings, I ask Gail what she thinks about

the racial politics of these pairings:

> Yeah, and there's kind of a sense that [Pairing A] has been very successful. For everyone, there's
> sort of a perception that that is a very successful pairing, and that it was partly a racial integration,
> but partly an economic integration. Although the Superintendent at the time was very clear about
> race integration being a key aspect of the pairing from his perspective… my friend, Georgia, has
> an e-mail from him that I've actually seen that says, "I took these six blocks of the Wheaton Hills
> neighborhood and I put it into Pairing B because I needed more white kids." And, quite frankly, it
> caused resentment in the neighborhood. We used to be Pairing A, and we got switched. And there
> was kind of the sense that we got the weaker end of the deal and that, for whatever reason, Pairing
> A is a stronger pairing, seems to work better, families seem very happy with that pairing, as far as
> I can tell. Now partly because of the Supreme Court decision that you can't use race as a basis, and
> I think partly just because time has passed and Pairing B has more options, I think there's a little
> bit less resentment about the whole thing, and it's easier to open enroll, so people have more
> public school options but it has been a HUGE point of contention in this neighborhood.

Gail and I talk at length at various points during the data collection period as I develop a close

relationship with her about why Pairing A is considered to be "better" than Pairing B. Gail, as

well as other white Wheaton Hill parents, tells me that she thinks this logic exists because white

parents feel that their children have much to gain from interacting with Korean and Chinese kids

as opposed to the black kids affiliated with Pairing B:

> Everyone wants what's best for his or her kids and they want their kids to have advantages. And if you're not really confident you're going to get the best, it's hard to really be onboard with it, especially when you feel like the stakes are so high. Honestly, I think—and this is going to sound unbelievably racist because it is—I don't see this educated side of the Petersfield community seeing the underprivileged black community as having a lot to offer whereas people see the Asian community affiliated with the university as having lots to offer. I hear people say, "Well, what do we get out of it, you know? We potentially compromise our kids' education, there are maybe some risks, and there might be some danger? Why would we want that?" And I'm not saying I necessarily feel this way, but when I first heard that there was a gun scare at Wheaton Hills High, admittedly, it conjured up ideas about violence and gangs connected to the black community. And I had to be like, okay, Gail, check yourself.

Clearly, these assumptions on the parts of white affluent parents in Wheaton reflect

commonsense racial knowledge about what kind of diversity is positive and what kind is

negative in the lives of their kids (See Chapter 11 for further discussion of this). Racial

stereotypes including the model minority myth (Takaki 1998) as well as popular stereotypes

about black children and families dictate how parents make sense of the benefits of Pairing A in

comparison to Pairing B. Gail contrasts this scenario with the new dual language immersion

program in town, discussed by Mrs. Norbrook in Chapter 10:

> So there's this dual language immersion program at Pairing B and I am, right now, going through incredible machinations to try to get Noah into it. All of a sudden, I, who was really not interested in Pairing B ten years ago for a whole lot of reasons, some of them legitimate—like George's food allergies and reading struggles that the school refused to accommodate—some of them admittedly not, all of a sudden, I'm very excited about this school because I can see the advantage it would offer my child to be bilingual as well as to interact with the Latino community and to build partnerships and friendships there. But let's face it: first and foremost, I like the idea of my kid being bilingual. And I think lots of parents think this way—that is, in terms of what their kids get out of something.

Speaking very candidly with me, Gail admits that much like many of the other parents in

Wheaton Hills, actively choosing to be in racially diverse spaces only becomes meaningful and

important to parents in Wheaton Hills when they feel their children will benefit from the

experience. Becoming bilingual or associating with Asian students is seen as advantageous

educational experiences to parents while attending a school with a black students from particular neighborhoods in town like the predominantly Latino neighborhood or Hampton Court is seen as a disadvantage and something to avoid.

A Different Perspective on Child-rearing

While Gail is outright about the local logic, most parents are less willing to be so open with me. I talk to Gail about her bluntness. She explains to me that because their three children are quite spread out in age (she has a child in Kindergarten at the same time as she has a child in High School), she believes she and her husband have a unique perspective on raising children in Petersfield. Perhaps most striking is how many different schools the family has explored and the ultimate conclusions they have drawn as a result of their experiences. All three children began school in a private Montessori school because Gail strongly believes in the teaching philosophy of this approach to education, particularly for young kids. When George finished elementary school at the Montessori school, he then attended a private Catholic school, Saint Anne's, for middle school, finally attending Wheaton Hills high school, where he is now. When asking Gail why she opted in to Saint Anne's and out of Pairing B, she tells me that mainly it had to do with George's learning disabilities and severe allergies to common foods, which, after very negative experiences that put her child at great risk, she did not feel that the public schools were willing or capable of managing. The Catholic school, on the other hand, was very accommodating to George's needs, and Gail felt more comfortable sending him there. However, Gail tells me that she feels she is unusual in this sense:

> Most Saint Anne's parents have the perception that the public schools lack values, and they tend to be socially conservative, and so, they don't want their kids learning about same-sex marriage, and they don't want their kids learning sex ed in fourth grade. I think they want more management and control over some of the social issues and how they're presented to kids, and you get that in a Catholic school, you know. And people would say things to me like, "I want Christmas celebrated. I want my kids to be in a Christmas pageant." And they did. They really did…when Darren announced he was going to the public schools recently, the little community,

> meaning Darren's community, his peers, the perception is, "Why would you want to go there? It's scary. There are bullies. You know, people are drinking, and people are doing drugs, and people are having sex." And like there's this perception that there is this like wild, deviant behavior going on in the public schools that doesn't happen in Catholic schools, which, of course, is ridiculous. But there's this, I think there's a, more than wanting even religious values, there's a sense of protecting kids from negative social influence that people want when they go there. And I probably wanted that too. I think I did. And I wonder how much of that is informed by race and economic status? I don't know. Probably a lot.

Gail's comments speak directly to the notion of how parents construct racial contexts of childhood, choices that are informed by parent's political positions and tacit knowledge about race. The choices about schools are also tied to locally shared ideas about what kinds of kid are "good" and "bad" or "nice" and "deviant." What kids are doing drugs and having sex and what kids are innocently playing soccer and their trumpet? And who do you want your kids to be around on a daily basis? Saint Anne's is predominantly white and affluent and as Gail describes, many of the parents who send their children here, have similar beliefs about the kids and families who utilize public schools, beliefs that they may express in seemingly race-neutral terms but that are in fact, racially coded:

> I think Petersfield really wants to be a liberal, inclusive community. And I think that traditionally it has been a quietly, very segregated community. I mean, when I was growing up, the distinction between different parts of town, nobody ever *said* it was race-based, but it *clearly* was. I went to the elementary school three blocks from my house now, and there were like 12 kids in my third grade class, and they were all white. And I never thought anything of it—it just was the way it was. And I think that there is a sense now that you have minority families coming from Chicago because the benefits are good. I have no idea if this is accurate or not, but this is what people say. And I mean, people really believe that, without any hesitation, and that the people are often transient, and they're coming in. And that, you know, they're coming into the school environment, and maybe they're not up-to-speed academically or maybe they have some social behavioral issues or whatever, and that they're distracting time and attention from teachers. And the perception is that kids aren't getting as good an education. And nobody is going to say, these are the black kids in the classroom, but, you know, there's this sort of euphemism…And we are all parents who can provide a lot of support, but, at the same time, we're also parents who tend to really value academic achievement and want our kids to be poised to do well, successfully, and are afraid of anything that might undermine that. So that's why there is so much private schooling in my opinion. Parents are scared that their white kid won't get the best schooling because of the black kids in the public school classroom. It's a huge problem. And it makes me feel really uncomfortable about keeping the kids in private school.

In addition to Gail's reluctance to continue sending Darren to Saint Anne's, Darren hated the school, especially the sense of entitlement and privilege that he noticed in the other kids who attended the school. In Darren's words, "Those kids are just so out of touch with reality. It is pathetic. Oh look at me and my Hummer. Who drives a Hummer? That is so environmentally irresponsible! I mean you do *not* need a Hummer." Gail describes why she thinks Darren did not like this school:

> By the time Darren got to Saint Anne's, we found that rather than being a neighborhood school, it had become kind of a magnet school for fairly affluent people all over the Petersfield community. People were coming in from Apple Hills, they're coming in from Sheridan, and it had a much more wealthy affluence than I anticipated. And I mean, there's very little diversity. There's very little tolerance, if you will, for anything that, there's kind of a mold of the Saint Anne's kid. They are attractive, and they're bright, and they're good students, and they're good athletes and they're socially well-behaved. And if you're not like that, it's kind of hard. And so, like as Darren is kind of a quirky kid and you know, became a vegetarian, and started being interested in other things, people thought he was sort of weird. And I'm looking at this child and thinking, "You know, on the spectrum, this is not that weird of a child, really. I mean, there's weird kids and then there's Darren." And I'm thinking you know, he's growing up. He's starting to think that he's this like outlier when in fact he's really very normal. And so, we started thinking, you know, he might be happier in a school where there's a little more going on, where he wasn't the social diversity, which is really scary (laughing)"

Gail also expressed her frustration with a program Saint Anne's ran in which they paired up kids from their school with younger kids from the public school. While Gail thought it was intended to build relationships across the community, she later discovered that it stemmed from a feeling of charity on the behalf of the private school. "Yes, there's a higher poverty level in the public school, but not everybody there is poor and like what makes these kids the 'poor' kids and the Saint Anne kids some kind of 'saviors'? It really frustrated me and I was worried about Darren absorbing that stuff." As a result of years and years of thinking through these issues, particularly as George was going through Saint Anne's, Gail and Michael finally decided to move Darren from Saint Anne's to the public schools in town. Darren is really happy here now.

Overall, reflecting on her experiences with schools in Petersfield, Gail feels that many

parents in Wheaton Hills "over-react" and are overly sensitive about the choices they are

making, and that she too used to be that way too:

> I think, for me, because I have three kids who are really spread out, I now have like 15 years of experience with a myriad of daycare centers, and public schools, and private schools. And after all of that, you start to realize that kids are pretty resilient and that exposure to racial diversity really does have a value that is part of an educational experience. It's not just about test scores. And I think educators probably know that, because that's what they do, but I think most whit affluent parents don't. And I think that most parents who have like two kids, who are maybe two years apart, you don't have a lot of time to learn that, you know what I mean? Like you're just trying to do the best you can by your kid. But I have learned a lot over the last 15 years and the things that I once thought were the most important are maybe not so. Maybe doing best you can by your kid is about more than just academic achievement, you know?

Given what I learned from talking to the Hayes (See Chapter 9) and other families with TAG

students, I ask Gail about her thoughts on the TAG controversy at Wheaton Hills High School.

She explains:

> There's an enormous sense of competition about who is going to get into the local university, and how well you have to do, and yeah, you really don't even want to get me started on the TAG programs. I mean, that's a whole another thing. I mean, I feel like families that have sort of embraced public education, one way that's happened is, they've created these TAG programs, and it becomes a way to segregate within an otherwise integrated school. Because if you, and now, they're kind of working on that, but if you look at the numbers, it's mostly white kids or you know, there's an affluence. Because these are the parents who are going to go and say, "My kid is really bright. Test them. And if they don't qualify, test them again until they do." Meanwhile we have an enormous racial achievement gap that none of these parents want to address. Because they feel like it isn't their problem. This really frustrates me.

Gail continues:

> I work with unbelievably successful, brilliant lawyers and judges who are black and other minorities. And so, clearly, you can do it. But if you don't have those opportunities to begin with, I don't know how you get from here to there. And I don't know. I don't know the answer. I mean, it makes me really sad. And I think people here, they don't want to go there because they don't want to give up what they've got. Like what they've got for their kids is good, they don't want to mess with it. And I think there's this fear that with limited resources, if we focus our resources on closing the race achievement gap, the fear is that they're going to do it by closing it from the top down, and that then, the opportunities for their bright, well-prepared, educated, affluent kids are going to be less. And no one is willing to compromise when it comes to their children.

Gail, who tutors a black student at the high school and who follows community meetings about the state of black kids and education in Petersfield, (actually informing me when these events were taking place) was appalled at the behavior of many of her white, affluent peers who filed the lawsuit, arguing that the school was required by law to accommodate their high achieving children—a law suit they eventually won. Gail was hesitant to say too much about this debate on tape, but in our more casual conversations, she expressed me to me a number of times that she thinks that while some children are truly gifted and talented, many TAG designated children are simply kids who have had an extremely privileged, excellent educational upbringing—including attending a private TAG school in town that ends in 8th grade and thus requires students to then transfer to Wheaton Hills High—and that this TAG label allows them to receive more resources that other children would ultimately benefit from as well. Additional discussion around the politics of how one "gets their kid a TAG designation" (aka having the resources to have one's child tested privately) was also a feature of these public debates. What these debates demonstrate in part is the level of intensity surrounding the commitment to securing the "best" education for one's child at the same time that one recognizes the structural inequalities built into the system in which one is participating. For many families in Wheaton Hills, their top childrearing priority is providing the "best" academic experience for the children which means gathering the most academic resources for their child, getting the "best" teachers (which they fight hard for all summer when these decisions are being made by schools), and helping their child figure out the talent that the child can be "the best" at in comparison to his or her peers. ("What are you good at?") They refuse to "make their child a guinea pig" for the sake of their political beliefs as "the guinea pig may not get into Yale or Northwestern," as one parent put it, which is strikingly different from Evergreen parents who want their child to do what "makes them happy and

fulfilled." Notably, Wheaton Hills parents are not concerned about education for the sake of making a lot of money or having a powerful job in the future like Sheridan parents; rather, they want their child to be as highly-educated as possible, as this is a status and level of prestige that they hold and they believe this is what their child was intended to do—in many cases, because they themselves have done this, demonstrated by their Ph.Ds and MDs and JDs. These achievement-oriented interests, therefore, take precedence over attending diverse schools, traveling to experience human difference, or working to build relationships with anyone other than families that are similar to them in their goals, access to resources, and expectations. To put it simply, these families, by and large, are extremely focused on academic achievement, starting before their child is even born, and channel all kinds of resources into providing what they believe to be the best opportunities for their child to find academic success while in many cases ignoring or discounting the opportunities for their kids to have experiences with people who are different from them, particularly in terms of race.

Overall, while Gail and Michael Palmer-Ross are quite critical of the way other white parents in their community behave, at some level, they understand the behavior, even if they don't always agree with it. They too are committed to providing their kids with rich educational experiences, and only as a result of many years and varied experiences, are they beginning to challenge many of their own commonly held assumptions—particularly the assumption that racial and economic diversity isn't a legitimate aspect of a child's educational experience. In the end, Gail and Michael have made different choices about schools for their different kids at different points in time. However, only until recently, most of these choices have led to their kids being in predominantly white spaces. As Gail says, even in an integrated high school, patterns of segregation persist. And, Gail tells me, it is important to talk to the kids about these patterns.

Talking about Race

"What I try to tell my kids is to recognize that everyone harbors prejudice and that you need to see it in yourself and try to overcome it." Gail describes to me how she approaches discussions about race and other topics with her kids:

> I've kind of always been on the side of more information. I want my kids to learn about stuff from me. I mean, I'm sure my kids are the ones telling the other kids on the bus about the birds and the bees but I always sort of thought give them the information before they're even old enough to be embarrassed by it. So yeah, I don't try to protect my kids the way I see many other parents doing. I want them to have a good sense of what's going on in the world.

Because I spent a great deal of time with the Palmer-Ross family, I witnessed a number of moments in which Gail spoke very openly with her children about current events and political debates such as a local recall election, the death penalty and Troy Davis, the Occupy Movement, the Norway massacre, the Penn State sex scandal, the Arab Spring, the debt-ceiling political battle, and the tsunami in Japan, among many other topics, weaving issues of inequality throughout these various discussions. Gail, an attorney, likes to know both sides of an argument and she works hard to make sure her kids are presented with multiple perspectives on a news story or political argument.

Gail does not wait to talk to her kids about things unless they bring them up—rather, Gail initiates these conversations and speaks to her children about politics and other topics in almost the same way she speaks to other adults. This excerpt from my field notes is a good example of how Gail interacts with her kids:

> After we finished our ice cream, Noah wanted to play with my iPhone. There are some games on there that they are teaching me how to play—He and Darren showed me "cheats" on Doodle Jump so that I could change characters, and Darren also showed me aspects on my phone that I didn't know about. Darren is very good with technology and Noah isn't too far behind, especially given that he is only beginning to learn how to read. Darren was very interested in beating my high score. I joked with him that it wasn't that impressive to beat my score because I'm so bad at the game. He laughed with me. All three of us were hanging out laughing and chatting on the couch in the living room when Gail came home.

> Gail came in the front door, put her workbag down on the front bench, and said hello enthusiastically. The boys jumped up to hug her (especially Noah who clutched her leg as she tried to walk across the room.) She asked them how their days were going. They said, "Fiiiiine" in a dull and bored tone. Her response was, "There is a REVOLUTION going on, people!" She then proceeded to tell the kids all about what had happened that day in Egypt. Darren was fully engaged, asking if Mubarak was a pharaoh or not—Gail explained that it was similar but that Mubarak has no claim to divinity. She then transitioned into talking to me about it, offering her thoughts on the revolt. Darren continued to listen, taking it in. Noah was not paying attention as he had grabbed my iPhone again and was singing to himself.

While this conversation was not explicitly about race, Gail frequently arrived home wanting to

discuss current events with her kids. Many times these discussions were centered around social

injustice and in particular, race. She and I also talked openly about my project in front of the

kids, the children being fully aware of what I was studying. Here is another except from my field

notes:

> As I was talking to Gail today, I noticed that Darren was really interested in my project. He was standing nearby, playing with his yoyo, listening to the conversation that was taking place. When I told his mom that I would love to interview her because she had so much to say, he jumped in and said, "Maggie, can I be interviewed for your project too?" He wanted to know all about the interview and when we could set it up. He asked what the interview was about and I said "how kids think about race" and he kind of made a scrunched up face. I said, "you know, about how kids know what race they are and what race other people are." His mom jumped in and said, "Like, there aren't very many kids at your school that aren't white." Darren said, "Yeah, there are barely any people of color at my school." Shortly after this, Michael arrived home from work. We started talking more about my project and he said, sort of sheepishly, "Yeah, Petersfield is known for being liberal, but people may say they are one thing and vote differently." Gail then said, "Or they may vote one way and then send their kids to private school," laughing along with Darren and Michael. Darren was clearly "in" on the joke.

Darren is exposed to his parent's discussions, is encouraged to participate in these discussions,

and is presented with access to information about current events and politics on a regular basis.

Darren, while having few interactions with people of color, but talking frequently about race

with his parents and siblings and having a critical attitude toward other white people—especially

those he believes are "out of touch"— is growing up in a context where he can access

propositional knowledge about race easily, where he has no inter-racial contact that works to

reinforce racial stereotypes, but also has few friendships with people of color, although during the process of data collection, he switched schools and the potential for new friends shifted dramatically. He does, however, have relationships with other white children who he views as self-absorbed and "unaware of important things."

Darren's Perspectives on Race

Darren's perspectives on race are primarily focused on the critique of white people for being "clueless" or "ignorant" about issues of inequality, racial and otherwise and "not doing anything to make things better." Based on Darren's racial context of childhood, he has developed ideas about race that include a white racial consciousness that children growing up in Wheaton Hills generally lack. Rather than talking about people of color, as there are not many opportunities for this, Darren talks mostly about white peers who he finds "ridiculous" and "out of touch" and "racist." The first example of this comes from my field notes:

> One fall afternoon, I am driving Darren and Noah home from school. Noah is singing a Justin Bieber song and Darren has his hands over his ears, trying to block it out because he hates the music. Darren is loudly complaining about the song, which is playing on the radio and glaring at his little brother who is singing his heart out. We have a supposedly agreed upon system where each kid gets a turn to pick a song on the radio as we drive home. It is currently Noah's turn. We stop at a red light and see a group of high school girls running by my car. I say, "Hey look guys! That must be Wheaton Hill's cross country team!" in an attempt to distract them from physically fighting in the backseat, which I know is about to happen. The boys look over to where I am pointing and Darren states, "That doesn't look like Wheaton Hills team to me. They are all white." I looked closer at their t-shirts and sure enough, a few of the girls are wearing t-shirts from the local private Catholic high school—not Wheaton Hills High. I pointed this out to Darren and tell him that I was clearly wrong and he was right. He then responds, "Those girls are all so rich and snobby. Ugh. I'm glad I am going to get to go to Wheaton Hills when I'm in high school." I ask Darren what he means by this and he tells me that kids who go to the private Catholic high school are "rich white kids who don't know anything or care about anything real." He proceeds to tell me about attending a soccer game between the private Catholic school and the public high school in which the students from the private school were chanting, "We have teachers! We have teachers!" and wearing masks with the face of the governor on them.

This taunt was in reference to the teacher's union in Petersfield that was on strike for a few days. Not only did this taunting irritate the public school students but also caused many parents to get

up and leave the area. This particular political moment during my data collection was very

emotionally charged and there was a great deal of conflict, even in settings like soccer games.

> As Darren tells me this story, surprisingly, Noah sits quietly listening for a few moments, taking in what Darren is saying. When Noah finally interrupts Darren to ask him a question, Darren ignores Noah as he is trying to finish his story. Noah gets angry that he is being ignored and lightly punches his brother's arm. Darren then gets mad and punches him back. Fortunately, we have just arrived home by this point, and I distract them by asking them who can get to the front door first, the boys then racing out of the car, laughing as they race towards the house, Noah dragging his backpack through the snow as he runs after Darren.

Darren talks very openly about race in his daily life, as this example demonstrates, although if I

asked Darren directly about race relations, he was less likely to have comments to share. Rather,

his views come up organically and in the midst of his everyday life, like in the example of seeing

the cross-country team run by or in reference to current events such as kids at school celebrating

the death of Osama bin Laden or the death of Troy Davis by the state of Georgia or the

Zimmerman trial verdict. This moment also reveals the ways in which siblings shape what each

other knows and thinks about race, as I observe Noah listening to his older brother describe the

girls jogging by.

Interestingly, when Darren does talk about race, almost always these are negative

comments about other white people rather than about people of color. Darren is very critical of

his white peers, especially while attending the private Catholic school, as his own beliefs and

sense of fairness are often challenged by the kids at his school who display their wealth through

material items like Beats headphones and the newest sneakers or iPhones and cannot talk to

Darren about current events or politics in the way that Darren expects they ought to be able to

do. Specifically, Darren explains how some of his peers at Saint Anne's only support the

governor because their parents do and that "if you ask them actual questions, they have

NOTHING to even say!" Darren is appalled at his peers for holding such strong opinions about

something he believes they know nothing about. He gets very frustrated, often feeling like an outcast at school. Not only is Darren upset with his peers for not being informed, but he is appalled by their beliefs, particularly when it comes to health insurance for the poor, collective bargaining rights of public employees, the death penalty, and the unethical treatment of animals—he is a vegetarian despite everyone else in his family eating meat. Unlike his white peers in Evergreen who go to a racially integrated school and at times have negative things to say about their black peers, Darren only ever has negative things to say about his white peers.

Intergroup Contact and Friendship Formation

I ask Darren about his contact with people of color. This conversation takes place while he is still attending the private Catholic school, which is 98% white. He tells me, "Well, there's, well, in Milwaukee because there are, well, I mean, there are a lot of like Asian people in Asian restaurants. But I don't know, I don't really see very many people of color outside on the street in Petersfield." Darren suggests that outside of Asian restaurants, which are his favorite kind of restaurant, he does not have much interaction with people of color. He notes that when his family travels to Milwaukee, he sees "more black people because of poverty," explaining that many poor people cannot afford to live in Petersfield and that many black people are also poor. "But not all," he clarifies. "There are some very successful black people too, but many are poor and live in Milwaukee and Chicago, not here." I ask Darren if he thinks people who are poor could get more money somehow. He responds, "Well, if you are homeless, like really, really, really poor, I don't really know what to tell you. I don't think there is anything you can do." Unlike kids in Evergreen who attend schools that are racially mixed and thus sometimes come home with ideas that reinforce racial stereotypes given the kind of contact they have with their black and Latino peers, kids in Wheaton Hills like Darren, do not have contact of that nature. Rather,

the peers with whom they spend their days are other whites, and in the case of Darren, kids with whom he does not share worldviews.

Later, Darren tells me that part of the reason there is inequality in America is because schools are unequal. I ask him if he thinks it is fair that he goes to a private school while other kids can't afford to do that. He tells me, "No. It's not fair at all. That's why I don't want to go there. I'm just part of the problem!" This is striking in comparison to responses to this question by children such as the Schultz girls who insist otherwise or kids like Jessica Boone who have a very limited sense of the reality of attending private school in terms of inequity.

Talking about race often happens between siblings in the Ross-Palmer family given the differences in age groups. For instance, on numerous occasions, George, who is in high school, would give his younger brother advice for when Darren gets to high school. One day, while the kids are all sprawled out in the living room doing their homework together with me, Darren starts talking about how excited he is to go to the public school the following year. His parents have just decided to pull him out of Saint Anne's, and Darren couldn't be happier. George decides to start telling his brother about public school. "Be scared of the Mexicans," George tells Darren. "The Mexicans are the ones who beat people up because of gangs. That and the big black girls. They will hit you for no reason. The black guys are cool, especially the athletes." Noah, who is 5, sits in a large armchair trying to fit two pieces of a lego set together, listening to the conversation taking place between his two older brothers. It is unclear if he understands what they are saying, but he is certainly listening to them quietly. Darren asks George if he has any other advice. George tells him to be cautious while walking in the halls between classes. "You don't want to crash into the wrong person," he tells a now visibly anxious Darren. While part of George's agenda is clearly to scare his brother a little by talking about gangs and getting hit as a

form of teasing/sibling rivalry, it is notable that he includes race in these categories of things to watch out for, implying that to him, there is something scary about Mexicans and "big black girls." Darren, who listens to his brother, squints his eyes a little as George speaks, almost as if he doesn't believe his older brother. Darren tells George he is just "being a jerk" and "racist," but later, without George around, Darren asks me if there are gangs at the public school, his older brother clearly having an impact on Darren's perceptions of the school. Because Darren has not had much contact with people of color, hearing comments like those George shares seem to reinforce negative cultural views of black and Latino youth that Darren wants desperately to reject.

Another day, I leave Darren in the car while I go into Noah's school to pick him up. As I walk away from the car, I hear Darren lock the car doors behind me, as if he is scared of being in the car with the doors unlocked and me inside the school. Noah's school is located on the very edge of what is known around Petersfield as "the ghetto" or Hampton Court, a neighborhood that is predominantly black and impoverished. Gail tells me that many white parents are concerned about the location of the private school but that she thinks "it's fine." Noah occasionally mentions to me that he sees the "brown skinned kids" playing in the grassy park across the street from the school's fenced off playground. When I get back to the car with Noah, I casually ask Darren why he locked the doors, he tells me nonchalantly, "I just felt like it. Can we go get ice cream?"

On the last day of the school year, I take Noah and Darren to a party for Darren's school at a huge, new, fun playground that all the local kids love, regardless of how old they are. When we arrived, we noticed that there were other groups of kids also at the park, some there with teachers. I made the following observations of this end-of-the-year party:

A group of about six or seven black girls who looked to be in about 5th or 6th grade were playing on the tire swing. They were trying to spin each other on the swing and see how high and fast they could get. Occasionally, one would get irritated with another and some bickering would break out but they were generally laughing and having fun together. Not once did any of the white girls on the playground interact with them. In fact, the white girls avoided the black girls, even though other swings were open nearby. At one point, a white girl ran over to the swings and sat down on the swing but then jumped off and ran back to her other friends who were wildly playing tag. After the girl did this, two white mothers of white girls in Darren's class walked over and stood near the group of black girls. From my vantage point, it seemed like they were trying to create some kind of buffer between the two groups of girls. One of the black girls sat somewhat apart from the other black girls, watching the rest of the playground. At one point, she tattled to her teacher who was also nearby on some of the boys for gathering in one spot and saying swear words. The teacher who was also black went to look and the group of black boys scattered across the playground laughing hysterically. After some time passed, the teachers with the other group of kids stood up and yelled that everyone needed to make their way to the bus. The kids followed directions and they left without any incident. The two white moms then returned to the picnic table to join the other moms in their gossiping and discussion about shellac versus acrylic nail polish. They remained there for the rest of the party despite the cross-group interactions that continued to take place on the playground between groups of white kids from different schools. It was only when the black kids were on the playground that these mothers subtly intervened. Darren, who was sitting near me, taking a break from the hot sun, said to me, "Did you notice how those moms went over there? It's like they are scared of the black kids or something."

In this example, Darren made the same observations I did—that these white mothers appear to be threatened at some level by the playground behavior of the supervised black girls playing together on the tire swing. Despite their teacher standing nearby and their typical playground behavior, these moms still felt the need to move their bodies between these girls and the white private school girls. The movement was subtle and implicit, but clearly Darren noticed it and called it out, at least privately to me, demonstrating that he is thinking critically about these white women's behaviors and the subtle ways in which they send messages about race to the children around them. Darren, interestingly, interprets this behavior as negative, while other children of course could perceive it differently—that perhaps there is a real reason the mom's decided to come over, like that these black girls were somehow dangerous or a threat to the white girls.

Conclusions

Findings from the Palmer-Ross family are unique in comparison with findings from the other families studied in Wheaton Hills. In large part, this seems to be because of the ages of the Palmer-Ross children, Gail's rejection—or at least serious critique—of many of the commonly held assumptions in Wheaton Hills about race and education. Gail and Michael are also open to changing schools, trying different things, and have positive views of the language immersion program, particularly Gail.

Perhaps what stands out the most about their son Darren's racial knowledge is his critical perspective on other whites, something only two other children in this study overall expressed. While Darren does not have many inter-racial friendships and attends (during much of my data collection period) a predominantly, white, affluent, private school and lives in a white, affluent neighborhood, while other kids are critical of people of color, Darren is very critical of other white people, particularly those who express conservative political view points. At home, his family, including siblings, talk openly about race, such as George's warnings about avoiding Mexican kids or Gail's discussions about Troy Davis and the racial achievement gap. While George's comments tend to reproduce negative stereotypical views, Gail's discussions operate with a framework that recognizes structural racism, the history of race in America, and the continued racial inequities that persist today. And she shares this propositional knowledge with her children through her own explicit and implicit behaviors as well as the kinds of conversations she has with her children. These conversations are not usually planned out ahead of time but are rather responses to current events involving some kind of inequality. At the same time though, Gail spends a lot of time thinking about how to approach different topics with her children and is therefore prepared to engage with them when certain topics arise. In this sense, her behavior is not simply reactive but includes proactive elements as well. Darren, being inquisitive about these

topics, asks his parents and siblings and even people in his life like me questions about these events. He talks to other kids about these events, and while at Saint Anne's, growing increasingly frustrated with other children as well as even more committed to his own views. And, in some sense, Darren seems to gain affective knowledge about race through being around other white people who say things he finds to be "offensive" or completely "out of touch."

Overall, the racial context of childhood that Gail and Michael have constructed for Darren includes access to propositional knowledge about race, little opportunity for inter-racial contact until changing schools, rich conversations about race in America as well as current events, and an open critique of whiteness and white privilege. Darren interprets his whiteness in terms of comparing himself to other white children and adults and his interpretations of their behaviors. Darren is given the space and support in expressing these views, his parents respecting his critical thinking and perspectives on the world around him. An important piece of Darren's racial context is, then, his ability to access various performances and enactments of whiteness. Darren has the opportunity to critique the manicured mothers on the playground and his TAG and Saint Anne's peers. Yet, Darren does not, at least not as of when data collection ended, have access to the kind of inter-racial contact that leads kids to confirm stereotypes rather than form friendships as is the case for some of the Evergreen kids.

Overall, the racial context of Wheaton Hills is unique in its blend of different schooling options, its complicated drawing of elementary school lines tied to racial segregation and local racial commonsense, and the parents living here who identify as liberal but who are more likely to support private schooling, something Evergreen parents refuse to embrace. And, growing up in this racial context of childhood, shapes how kids like Darren form ideas about race and perspectives on inequality—ideas that in Darren's case are accompanied by a sense of needing to

take action. Darren switching schools was driven, in part, by Darren's need to feel like he was in an environment that was more open-minded with people interested in current events and politics rather than new shoes and Hummers. Darren's interest in attending rallies and protests, getting into arguments with peers at school when they said things Darren thought were racist or offensive, and Darren's challenging of his brother when being teased about the Latino gangs demonstrate that Darren possesses an "ethnics of accountability" much like his peer Conor in Evergreen. And, Darren's sense of agency and desire to be a actor for social good can be attributed, in part, to the context of childhood constructed for Darren by his parents.

Summary of Part III: Theory and Practice

While a number of families in my study operated with what I call a color-conscious ideology or narration about race, this did not lead to consistency in action as I found with families employing colorblind ideological views. For instance, families I studied who live in Evergreen prioritized developing an anti-racist praxis within their children, or "conscious thought and action to dismantle racism and end racial inequities in U.S. society" including "not only direct-action antiracism by whites but also 'everyday' behaviors, from voting to making choices about where to live and work" (Perry and Shotwell 2007). However, I found that families in Wheaton Hills, for the most part, were much less concerned with the "action" portion of antiracist praxis. Rather, these families articulated the "conscious thought" component of antiracist praxis yet behave in ways that seem to contradict these ideas. As such, families living in these two places—Evergreen and Wheaton Hills—expressed similar ideas about racial dynamics but lived these ideas in very different ways. These deviations had significant consequences for racial socialization of children in terms of how they produce knowledge about race and racism in contemporary America.

While in contrast to colorblind families like those who live in Sheridan, Wheaton Hills parents who I interviewed vehemently claim that they value "diversity" and want their children to "learn about diverse cultures and people." At times, the way that parents use this term "diversity" maps onto research about "diversity discourse" or "happy talk" in which the term "diversity" is a euphemism for race and allows whites to talk comfortably about race without talking about oppression (Anderson 1999). Other scholars refer to a similar concept of "shallow multiculturalism," which is celebrating multiculturalism in terms of food, language, and customs, etc. while not addressing the reality of power, privilege, or structural inequality (Bell and Hartmann 2007).

These concepts of "diversity discourse" and "shallow multiculturalism" are connected to the theory of racial apathy in which whites provide "passive support for an unequal racial status quo" (Forman 2004, 59). Racial apathy is an "indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and lack of engagement with race-related social issues" (Forman 2004, 44; See also Forman and Lewis 2006). Like diversity discourse or shallow multiculturalism, racial apathy is centered on whites ignoring racial inequality and behaving in ways that passively reproduce racial inequality while at the same time, allow whites to appear in socially acceptable ways, specifically, without racial prejudice. And while the Wheaton Hills family in my study certainly engaged in the passive forms of behavior associated with racial apathy, they do not necessarily express the type of indifference toward inequality or race-related social issues present in the theory of racial apathy, at least not in terms of what they frequently tell their children. Rather, many of these parents talked openly with their children about oppression.

However, I did find that beneath the surface, many of these parents held negative views of poor blacks as a social group, specifically—ideas were constantly masked and justified,

perhaps because of the guilt many of them held for holding the attitudes they did. Because of the ethnographic nature of this study, I was able to address some of the challenges faced by survey research. As Bonilla-Silva (2006) discusses, "surveys on racial attitudes have become like multiple-choice exams in which respondents work hard to choose the 'right' answers (ie., those that fit public norms.)" Because I spent so much time with families in Wheaton Hills, I was able to move beyond accessing simply the 'right' answers and instead, figure out what these parents actually believe to be true. And, given my observations and findings, it seems that a conundrum exists: while Wheaton Hills parents genuinely believe in the color-conscious things they say about structural inequality, they *also* hold some deeply negative views about specifically *blacks living in poverty*. And, because of these views, many parents here actively work to avoid having their children come into contact with this segment of the population—and again, it is very specifically poor black children. However, because of their desire to not seem racist, as well as their own internalized guilt about feeling the way they do about poor blacks, these parents "mask their views by drawing on some other motive"—a behavior of strategic avoidance that Dovidio and his colleagues (2000, 2001) found college students doing in laboratory settings as part of Dovidio's research on aversive racism.

As I have demonstrated, drawing on rationales inclusive of the obesity epidemic, their religious affiliation, their child's happiness, their priority of academic excellence, and their child's status as "gifted and talented," the majority of the parents I interviewed in Wheaton Hills, justify their avoidance of public schools, community events focused on open dialogs about local inequality in which large numbers of black parents are present, support for programs designed to reduce the racial achievement gap, and engagement with the perspectives of the people of color around them *at the same time that they recognize and speak to existence and problem of*

structural racism. I refer to this phenomenon as "justified avoidance." Unlike aversive racism, however, even when Wheaton Hills parents can get away with "expressing distaste for blacks," they are cautious to do so, as they seem to be having some type of internal struggle with themselves. As one mother put it to me during our discussion of whether she perceives unknown black teenagers as threatening, "If I'm honest, yes. I do feel threatened. I don't want to feel this way, but I do. I would never admit this to my kids but it's the truth."

As a result of many of these color-conscious parents' participation in justified avoidance, their children spend very little time interacting with specifically *impoverished or working class* people of color, and specifically, impoverished or working class *black children*. As a result, I find that children growing up in the racial context of Wheaton Hills are presented with *propositional knowledge* (that which can be evaluated by reason such as "the criminal justice system treats people of color negatively") and *tacit knowledge* (commonsense knowledge that includes the recognition of white normativity) through the interactions they have with white adults in their lives as well as other white children growing up in the same context (Perry and Shotwell 2007). Wheaton Hills children know about and can talk about, at least in the abstract, their privilege, the existence of contemporary racism, the history of race in America, and the nature of contemporary inequality. However, the choices many of these parents make about other aspects of their child's life, such as school choice, neighborhood choice, extracurricular choices, etc., do not facilitate the development of *affective knowledge* about race in their children, especially given that the children are rarely in environments in which they can interact with people of color. Affective knowledge that is developed is centered around what is understood to be "the good diversity" in Petersfield—the international community, though Darren seems to develop affective knowledge through his negative encounters with other whites.

With the exception of the Palmer-Ross family as discussed in Chapter 12, these findings generally lie in contrast to findings about families in Evergreen who seek to provide their children with all three of these types of knowledge, the types of knowledge necessary for the cultivation of anti-racist praxis, as Perry and Shotwell (2007) argue. The result is that overall, many Wheaton Hills children can talk fluently about structural racism in America but they lack a sense of empathy or real commitment to both reactive and everyday social action. In other words, most Wheaton Hills kids I interviewed do not offer "a felt recognition of the wrongs of racism" and do not have "close relationships with people of color" and do not witness first-hand "race-based social suffering" the way that some Evergreen children do (Perry and Shotwell 2007). Interestingly however, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Wheaton Hills children also do not develop negative racial stereotypes the way that some of the children attending integrated schools in Evergreen do. Thus, these findings are also explained by drawing on social psychological literature that suggests a particular set of conditions must be in place for cross-racial contact to result in positive outcomes (Allport 1954, Pettigrew 1997, Forman 2004).

In sum, my findings suggest that color-conscious contexts are variable. While in Evergreen parents ideas correspond with their actions, for many families in Wheaton Hills, a paradox exists in which ideas about race do not always map onto the behaviors one might expect, and thus influence one's child's racial context of childhood.

CHAPTER 13: Conclusions

Ethnographic data gathered from thirty families over the course of nearly two years reveals some of the key aspects of white racial socialization in affluent families in a Midwestern community. Specifically, this dissertation explores the mechanisms through which white children produce racial knowledge as well as the content of the knowledge they produce. I find that white racial socialization takes place in the choices parents make about context—choices that are often shaped by racial ideology and which structure children's opportunities for interaction with and observation of the social world. Whereas research on families of color finds purposeful, overt racial socialization, white racial socialization can be attributed primarily to implicit parental decisions which may often appear not to be about race at all, but which are in fact shaped by racial ideology. This finding suggests that the process of white racial socialization differs in important ways from racial socialization in black, Latino, Asian and multiracial families:
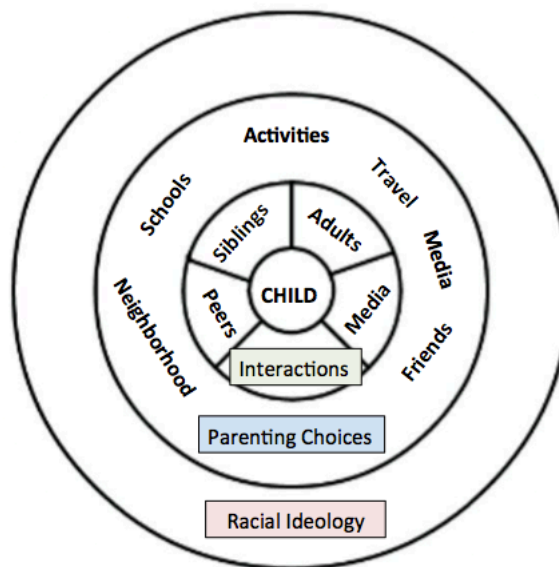

Figure 5. Racial Context of Childhood

I find that the general mechanism of racial context as a means of racial socialization remains consistent across families. However, variation exists in *how* parents construct racial contexts of childhood, even across one metropolitan area, and even across families who adhere to similar racial ideological positions. This dissertation examines three distinct contexts, examining elements of these contexts tied to the decisions either deliberately or accidentally made by parents including: school choice, neighborhood choice, availability of and type of intergroup contact for children, travel decisions, extracurricular choices, how to/whether to talk about race, and the kinds of modeling that parents offer, among other behaviors. I find that children produce different kinds of racial knowledge about themselves and others as a result of interacting within these contexts.

Parents who deny the salience of race (Sheridan) adhere to colorblind ideological positions, which inform the parenting choices that they make. Parents who accept the notion that race matters in contemporary America adhere to color-conscious ideological positions or narrations about race (Evergreen and Wheaton Hills). However, while a number of the families in my study operated with what I call this color-conscious ideological position or narration about race, this did not lead to general consistency *in action* as I found with colorblind families. Rather, I find two very different color-conscious contexts—one defined by parents seeking to cultivate an anti-racist praxis in their children (Evergreen) while the other (Wheaton Hills) defined by parents

In Sheridan, parents have set up for their children a racial context of childhood that is, for all intents and purposes, almost entirely white. Their choices about schools, neighborhoods, and extracurricular activities set up a homogenous social environment. Yet, given their multiple life choices that have led them to live mostly segregated lives, the families I interviewed in Sheridan

expressed an almost universal racial commonsense that they are colorblind. They do not think race matters anymore for themselves or others. However, like others studying colorblind ideology have found, these parents explicitly deploy colorblind narratives about race while also holding very color-conscious negative views about people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2013, Forman & Lewis 2006, among others). I find that the mechanisms of racial socialization in Sheridan are primarily implicit with many subtle and indirect messages about race pervading daily life including the choices of context of childhood and opportunities for experience and interaction. However, conversations about racial matters occasionally become explicit. When this happens, parents and children's very color-conscious racial understandings become apparent. In addition to expressing a general form of colorblind ideology, these children generally lack a sense of awareness or concern about historical and contemporary forms of racial inequality and participate in racial apathy (Forman 2004). The children in Sheridan possess very little knowledge about contemporary racial dynamics or patterns of inequality but yet still have generally acquired a range of negative perspectives on people and communities of color.

In Evergreen, parents intentionally seek to design a racial context for their children that offers tools necessary for their children to cultivate an antiracist praxis, or "constant thought and action to dismantle racism and end racial inequities in the United States" (Perry & Shotwell, 2007: 34). Parents' deliberate decision-making about where to live, what schools to send their children to, where to travel, etc. map onto these narratives and are informed by a commitment to what they often refer to as "social justice." While some parents attempt to drill a particular set of beliefs and values related to racial justice into their children especially when children encounter everyday racism or positive consequences of their own privilege, other parents take a more

subtle yet still deliberate approach. These parents try to make talking about race commonplace and ordinary in the life of the family.

In all of these families though, they face a conundrum of privilege, or the paradox of living in a world rife with structural inequality. In addition, these parents are faced with the challenges of raising children who receive counter-messages or even messages that are hostile to the ones they are attempting to teach their kids at home when their children enter their schools. So too do some of the children in this study pick up or adopt negative stereotypical views about people of color at school, presumably as a result of intergroup contact that does not meet the necessary conditions for it to have positive effects on white racial perspectives. As a result of structural limitations that make real critical multicultural engagement difficult to achieve, many of the white Evergreen children reproduce negative views about children of color despite their parents' best efforts otherwise. Teachers in these schools, for instance, based on what children indicated, are either not equipped or not willing to critically engage discussions about race, racism, and privilege in the classroom, leaving students with many questions about race as well as opening the door for negative stereotypes to reproduce themselves at school. As such, it appears, based on my data, that schools are relinquishing their responsibility to help children make sense of their lives in ways that are informed, engaged, and critical.

Despite these very real challenges, however, many of the children in this study living in Evergreen are well-informed about race in America, they are passionate and determined to try to see change happen, and they speak openly about their own fears as well as the fears of many of their white peers when it comes to dialog about racism. Certainly, they are far more equipped to have these conversations than their peers in Sheridan, and their emotional connection to this subject matter is far greater than compared to that of Wheaton Hills' children.

In Wheaton Hills, most parents appear to participate in what I call "justified avoidance," which has some similarities with and connections to what scholars refer to as "diversity discourse", "shallow multiculturalism", "aversive racism", and "racial apathy" (Anderson 1999; Bell and Hartmann 2007; Gaertner & Dovidio 1986; and Forman 2003). Drawing on rationales such as academic achievement, gifted and talented needs, diversity discourse, "good diversity," the obesity epidemic, and religion, these parents make choices particularly around school that put their children in environments that are either predominantly-white (Saint Anne's, TAG School) or where a critical perspective on diversity is missing from curriculum and dialog (Public Schools). Thus, it is not always the case that the ideological positions of parents neatly map consistently onto their parenting behaviors. One exception to the finding of justified avoidance was observed—the Palmer-Ross family. This finding suggests that variation exists, even within one broadly construed context as well as the possibility for parents to change their minds as their children age, or as they have multiple children go through the same school system.

Overall, this research explores the complexity and nuance of how racial contexts of childhood are constructed, disjunctures that exist within them, how racial contexts of childhood are experienced and lived, and what the consequences of growing up within them are in terms of how white middle-school-aged children produce knowledge about race, racism, and privilege. My data also includes the voices and experiences of both race and class privileged parents and children as they do their best to make sense of the complicated and fundamentally unequal and unjust society in which they live.

Future Directions

Like all ethnographic work, the findings from this study are not generalizable to a broader population. However, based on what we know about the prevalence of colorblind

ideology in American society as well as severe residential segregation, it would follow that a place like Sheridan may be a more common racial context for affluent white children than Evergreen or Wheaton Hills. Future studies ought to consider the prevalence of particular types of racial contexts in America.

In addition, given how contexts vary even across one community, understanding the range of different types of racial contexts constructed, particularly across geographic region or socioeconomic group, is an important future direction. This study ought to be replicated in different regions or with different class groups. This work also ought to be expanded to include children of other age groups.

This study also ought to be expanded to a longitudinal analysis of how children's perspectives on race either stay the same or change as they enter young adulthood. In the future, I intend to revisit original child participants as they complete high school and again in late adolescence to evaluate how constant or dynamic white kids' views on race are as they transition from middle childhood to adolescence.

Finally, one aspect of this project that I was unable to successfully implement was child-led focus groups. In the future, I would like to have children discuss race with one another, ideally without an adult researcher present but rather lead by a child with some training on running focus groups and a recorder. Having children like Conor and Natalie debate their perspectives on race would provide rich insight into children's perspectives—insight that might not otherwise be attainable.

Final Remarks

As Bonilla-Silva writes, racial ideologies are one 'mechanis[m] responsible for the reproduction of racial privilege in a society' or a racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva 2006: 9).

Thus, children like Conor but unlike Natalie possess the rhetorical tools and critical consciousness necessary to challenge and rework dominant racial ideology, demonstrating the participatory role children play in social change and hopeful possibilities for future racial justice and equity. I am not suggesting that these color-conscious children are "better whites" than colorblind Sheridan kids. I am suggesting, however, that the implications of possessing different kinds of racial knowledge are significant to the type of racial discourse that can occur in America among the youngest generation. Of course, white parenting choices alone will not undo the persistent and pervasive structural inequality of American society. However, systems of privilege will only be dismantled if the reproduction of them and the ideologies that support them are understood and challenged. And, this work, in part, includes understanding and challenging the process of white racial socialization.

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