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Shocking Inequality:  
Teachers' Subjective Experiences of Segregated Schools

By

Jessica Shannon Cobb

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Barrie Thorne, Chair  
Professor Jerome Karabel  
Professor Leslie Salzinger

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## Abstract

### Shocking Inequality: Teachers' Subjective Experiences of Segregated Schools

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

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The teachers of poor, urban schoolchildren of color are currently at the center of an ideological battle over educational inequality in the US. The popular media and political rhetoric dichotomize teachers as heroes or villains and blame them for persistent achievement gaps related to race and class. Although teachers are indeed central to educational processes, this scapegoating elides the ways in which inherently unequal schooling conditions constrain teachers' ability to engage their students. To move beyond reductive accounts of teaching, my research examines the institutional and interpersonal factors that shape teachers' experiences and practices of caregiving. I provide critical insights into connections between student needs, school resources, and teachers' care and ways in which these are implicated in the reproduction of inequality. Theoretically, these findings illustrate the importance of connecting structural inequalities to lived human experience. Practically, my research suggests new approaches to supporting teachers' work and challenging the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic inequality.

This dissertation explores teachers' experiences of unequal schooling conditions through in-depth interviews with 60 teachers in three public high schools located in different school districts of Los Angeles County. The schools I selected were *de facto* segregated in terms of race and class demographics: One served a student population that was wealthy and majority white with a large Asian American minority; the other two schools served populations that were low-income, majority Latino and African American. Each school had a historical relationship to white flight and distinctive connections between the school and the community. The site selection makes a critical contribution to the study of segregated schools by opening up the Black-white binary to understand shifting demographics and by examining the ongoing preservation of white privilege. I coined the term "quarantined disadvantage" to describe the current, unequal conditions of schooling in Los Angeles suburban schools.

To examine the effects of three unequal school contexts on teachers' subjective experiences, I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with teachers, covering topics such as the teachers' personal background, significant school-based relationships, and their work context. Drawing on these interviews, I demonstrate that inequality is reproduced through circumscribing teachers' ability to meet students' diverse needs

through the provision of care; however, teachers' care also provides fertile ground for radical challenges to institutional inequality. This dissertation intervenes in the study of school inequality by shifting the focus from the material conditions of segregated schools and their effects on student outcomes to the social conditions of segregated schools and their effects on teacher emotions. I explain how the adults most intimately connected with unequal educational conditions and student disadvantage: (1) bear the psychic weight of racist social policies and processes; (2) reap particular psychic rewards from relationships with various populations of students and parents; and (3) cognitively support working within a system of schooling that systematically privileges some students while disadvantaging others. This research interrogates how race and class inequality that appears *prima facie* shocking to outsiders is lived, reproduced, and sometimes challenged through the daily experience of caring and dedicated teachers.

To my Dad  
Lucas Cobb  
“It’s my own invention”

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## Chapter One Introduction

*Teachers teach because they care. Teaching young people is what they do best. It requires long hours, patience, and care.*  
- Horace Mann

*Often, teachers write to The Times about reform by complaining that they are being held accountable for the failures of uninvolved parents. To some extent, that's true. But it's too easy for union supporters to avoid talking about truly awful teachers -- including the teachers who just don't care.*

- LA Times Opinion LA post by Karen Klein, 11/18/11

In the national debate over school inequality, public school teachers are often portrayed as either heroes or villains. Movies like “Dangerous Minds” and “Freedom Writers” depict dedicated teachers who transcend constraints of poverty, neighborhood violence, and school dysfunction to transform their “ghetto” students into inspired scholars. These films are the sunny counterpart to a stormy political climate marked by buzz-phrases like “teacher accountability” and “merit pay,” suggesting that individual teacher performance is responsible for persistent and systemic gaps in student achievement based on race and class. Together, these representations suggest that caring, hard-working teachers enable students to overcome race and class inequality; thus, deeply entrenched social inequalities must be the fault of teachers who are uncaring and lazy.

This explanation of pernicious educational inequality in the US was converted into political capital by President George W. Bush. In advocating for the No Child Left Behind Act, President Bush argued that we must “challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations” by focusing on achievement outcomes as the primary mechanism of school reform. Both President Bush’s phrasing and the policy he promoted suggest that racism and class disadvantage are not endemic to educational and social institutions; rather, they are produced by teachers who fail to believe in low-income students of color. No Child Left Behind passed with bipartisan support, and this focus on teacher accountability continued into the Obama presidency.

The discourse associated with accountability policies has been decried as teacher bashing in opinion pieces and blogs, but the weight it carries suggests that it merits deeper attention. The dichotomized representation of teachers as heroes and villains rests on two fundamental assumptions. The first assumption is that *care* is an individual-level variable; that is, some teachers *care* about their students while others do not, and it is policymakers’ job to weed out uncaring teachers. Caring teachers, in this understanding, are not shaped by particular organizational and social conditions; instead, they enter the classroom with rolled-up sleeves and open hearts. The second assumption is that racism and class disadvantage are not structural features of schools as organizations. Instead, schools are designed to act as meritocratic mechanisms for mobility. If teachers or administrators treat their students with “soft bigotry,” such discrimination is an individual problem, not a fundamental feature of schooling in America.

These assumptions require empirical scrutiny. Teachers in the US work in a context of persistent inequality, not only in terms of student outcomes, but also in terms

of inputs of material resources and teacher training across schools serving different populations (Oakes 2004). Sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, they work under increasing *de facto* segregation in schools and neighborhoods where students have little contact with peers across the divide of race and class privilege (Wegman 1994; Orfield and Lee 2005). They work in a context of new educational challenges that are experienced differently across race and class-segregated schools: growing immigrant populations with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Orfield and Lee 2006) and increased child homelessness and hunger (Bassuk, Murphy et al. 2010). And they work in diverse organizations that vary across school boards and school administrations in terms of values and policies (Ingersoll 2003).

Given this context, it seems appropriate to reverse the question asked by politicians. Rather than ask “how does individual caring impact inequality?” (the answer too often assumed in politics is that individual caring is the driving force behind inequality), sociologists must ask: **How does school inequality affect teachers’ caring?** This reversal allows us to examine schools as *contexts for care* – in terms of both the activity of caring-for and the sentiment of caring-about – and to question how school-level factors such as histories of racism and class hostility, access to material resources, and differences in school demographics affect the emotional relationships formed between teachers and students. In the vignettes that follow, drawn from detailed case studies of teachers in three Los Angeles county high schools that are historically and currently segregated by race and class, three individual teachers provide their perspectives on what it feels like to work in their particular schools. These stories open up room for a new discussion of systemic educational inequality, and how it affects the daily caring work of teachers.

\* \* \*

I was briefly lost on the way to my interview with Gloria Agu.<sup>1</sup> When we spoke on the phone, we agreed to meet in her classroom, number B7, at 3pm on the last day of school before summer break. I entered Bunker High School – a public high school serving a low-income, majority Latino and African American suburb of Los Angeles with a reputation as a violent “ghetto” – through a gate in the tall, spiked iron fences that surrounded and cut through the campus. I walked into a shady quad surrounded by the single-story bungalow style buildings typical of California public schools that expanded during the 1960s and 70s, each of which was assigned its own letter. The problem was, I didn’t see a B. I asked a group of students for directions, but they told me there was no B building. I flagged down an adult who was walking across the quad, talking on his cell phone, and he told me that the room I was looking for might be in the basement of the main building.

The main building was an imposing, two-story, turn-of-the century school building that once housed the local community college as well as the high school. From the main hall, the architectural beauty of the building was still visible in the high ceilings, wide halls, and sweeping stone stairways, though the dingy, badly touched up paint, inspirational quotes stenciled on the walls, and acoustic ceiling tiles conveyed its status as a crowded public high school serving a low-income community. When I entered basement classroom B7, this status became even more apparent. A pillar divided the

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<sup>1</sup> All names of respondents, cities, and schools have been replaced with pseudonyms.

narrow room, and HVAC tubing ran across the ceiling. The only natural light came from a row of slim utility windows at the top of one wall. The walls were bare, but Gloria, a 54 year-old Nigerian American with 17 years of teaching experience, assured me this was only due to the timing of my visit – just the day before, a student helped her take down the posters and student work that had brightened the classroom space.

Gloria had been teaching French in this classroom for over seven years, since she started working fulltime at Bunker High School. She had a lifelong passion for teaching and had taught all ages and levels from pre-school to college across a span of 30 years. Growing up in Nigeria, she regarded teachers with awe, admiring “the way they speak, the way they know almost everything.” She enjoyed her work at Bunker HS, appreciating how her students made her laugh every day, moments when a lesson worked particularly well, and times when she personally connected with a student through their shared Christian faith. Gloria got along well with other teachers at Bunker HS, and was personal friends with one of the Spanish teachers and other teachers from her home country.

Despite a passion for teaching, Gloria’s story of her time at Bunker High School emphasized a lack of resources and organizational dysfunction. Gloria complained that the school library did not have a language lab; that her basement classroom lacked the wireless internet access necessary to use valuable multimedia tools; that students could not afford and often did not have the citizenship documents to engage in educational travel; and that when she ordered headphones for her students to practice auditory comprehension, only 12 arrived, and those did not come until the end of the school year. She attributed the last problem to an unresponsive school bureaucratic structure as much as to insufficient funding; there were also other indications of organizational dysfunction. For example, the principal did not know Gloria’s name but instead called her “sister friend,” and all of the French club’s annual events had been cancelled that year due to poor scheduling. More outrageously, when Gloria was hired, she was told she would be the school’s only French teacher, but for the first two semesters she was also assigned to teach introductory Spanish, a language she did not speak. The assignment was overwhelming to her and shocking to parents, some of whom came to Back to School Night “purposely... to see this teacher who is teaching Spanish without knowing Spanish.”

Gloria described many challenges facing her students both at the school and in their community. She saw that students faced challenges related to poverty, citizenship status, household structure, and local gang violence, though she credited the principal with curtailing violence on the school campus. She believed these challenges had detrimental effects on her students’ motivation to learn and to achieve in school, and that these effects extended to her work as a teacher. In Gloria’s opinion, where students lacked motivation, for whatever reason, teacher performance suffered:

[Bunker HS students’] background does not support learning and zeal for education. That is their problem – motivation is their greatest challenge. Because I used to tell them: ‘Look, where I come from [in Nigeria], the students know that it’s through education that they’re going to get out of their poverty, out of their situation. So they don’t take it for granted. They are serious about it. But over here [in the US], there’s no seriousness... So it kills even the energy of the teacher. You want to do more? You’re

like, forget it.’ So that’s what I see as a challenge. Now, it could be from the economic background or the social background because some of them are in foster care, all of that stuff. But the dream – you know, Martin Luther King said, ‘I have a dream.’ It doesn’t look like they have one. And you need to have it to really do well in school.

\* \* \*

Prestige High School is located twenty-two miles from Bunker High School, across the sprawling metropolis that is Los Angeles County. At the time of my study, it was the only public high school in a wealthy, majority white suburb and had a reputation as an “academic powerhouse” and a feeder school to the University of Southern California. When I arrived at the school for the first time early one spring morning, I had to double check to make sure I was indeed in the faculty parking lot. Used to the protection (and threat) implied by fences at schools like Bunker HS, I was surprised to park in an open lot positioned directly in front of the school, where students would have free access to teachers’ cars. This openness was typical of the campus, however; aside from chain-link fences around the athletic facilities, I saw no fences on the campus and met no security guards on my way in. I made my way to the school’s main building – a three-story, white concrete structure erected in the early 1960s with classrooms at the center and walkways running around the perimeter. Though the campus was cleaner than the other two schools I visited for this study, the walls of the stairwells exhibited the occasional dried piece of gum or graffiti romantic declaration - familiar signs of teenage appropriation of space.

The wealth commanded by Prestige parents was not fully apparent from the external physical plant, which, aside from fresh paint, appeared to have been updated little in the past 50 years. The moment I entered Andrew Stetler’s classroom, however, I could see that he had benefited from generous funding. The large, clean, carpeted room was fully equipped with new lab benches, and an LCD projector hung from the ceiling. Andrew, a 54 year-old white teacher, reported that his students regularly used interactive clickers, which he had purchased through voluntary lab fees. He hoped to purchase more lab materials through an additional educational grant from the school foundation, which provided funds through parent contributions that often exceeded the expected minimum donation of \$2500 per student.

Andrew had taught at Prestige HS for his entire 21 years as a secondary teacher. Holding a PhD in biochemistry, Andrew sought a career change after becoming disillusioned with the academic research process and struggling with patient death as part of his work on clinical trials. As a self-described “people person,” Andrew was attracted to teaching and began working as a substitute teacher. He interviewed for a full-time position at Prestige High but left the interview unsure of whether he would take the job due to scheduling conflicts. Jokingly, though, he told me that as he walked to the parking lot, he saw a \$10 bill lying on the ground, and he immediately made up his mind that he wanted to work in the school. The fact of a bill of that denomination lying on the ground suggested that no one needed to pick it up, crystallizing Andrew’s realization that “this is one of the richest districts in the area. It’s one of the best in the area.”

Teaching in a high-income community was not without its drawbacks for Andrew. Early in his career, one student asserted a superior class position by snidely

asking Andrew to change a \$100 bill on a regular basis. Some parents felt they knew how school material should be taught and treated teachers as if they were “subservient.” Andrew described student struggles with eating disorders, online bullying, and involvement in high-end drug distribution as problems related to the wealth of their community. By and large, however, Andrew drew immense satisfaction from his work at Prestige HS, thanks to his students’ engagement with school and the knowledge they gained from their home environment. In his science classes, he had one student who taught himself organic chemistry over the summer and another who built a 12-foot Tesla coil in his free time. Discussing the advantages of working at the school, Andrew stated:

The students are unbelievable. They’re hungry to know. Part of the advantages of being from a wealthy district is we do not have the three-month off-season that the poor districts have. We have students going to every place on the planet... learning about Costa Rica, Peru, Galapagos, and visiting those locations and learning. Going to Harvard, Stanford for summer programs. Getting internships at [local hospitals and research institutes]. That's some of the strengths.

\* \* \*

At first glance, the stories of Gloria Agu and Andrew Stetler provide some powerful contrasts. Their respective schools, which I call Bunker HS and Prestige HS, exemplify inequalities of material resources that exist across schools with different demographics, even in the same metropolitan area (Orfield and Lee 2005). Gloria’s bare-bones basement classroom reflected insufficient public funding for education in the state of California (Oakes 2004), even as Andrew’s ample classroom resources were funded by generous donations from wealthy local parents. Fences cordoned Bunker High School from the local community, in line with the trend toward prison-like structures in schools in low-income neighborhoods (Hirschfield 2008); no such fences loomed over Andrew each morning as he entered Prestige’s clean, open campus where a ten-dollar bill might rest unmolested in the parking lot. The availability of technology, a rising concern among 21<sup>st</sup> century educators, was predictably poor at Bunker HS, where access to wireless Internet and multimedia equipment was spotty at best. In contrast, teachers at Prestige HS were able to take advantage of up-to-date technological resources to enhance their students’ learning in and outside of the classroom.

Beyond material resources, Gloria and Andrew’s comments demonstrate different experiences of their students. Intellectually, both teachers were well aware that the communities where they worked were marked by class advantage or disadvantage, and that the class dynamics of the community affected their students’ ability to engage with school. Emotionally, however, this led to different experiences of teaching for Gloria and Andrew. Whereas Andrew was energized as he worked with students who had a “hunger to know,” Gloria had her energy “killed” by students who lacked a “dream” for the future.

Comparing these two vignettes side-by-side, it is easy to recognize a common critique of “teacher accountability” policies: that teaching in a school serving high-income students is qualitatively different than teaching in a school marked by poverty. Because of their backgrounds, Gloria’s students appear to be more in need of care than Andrew’s, but Gloria had fewer material resources to provide such care. In addition,

caring for students was more taxing for Gloria than for Andrew, who received energy and enthusiasm back from his students.

If we were only to look at stories like Gloria and Andrew's, the message of this research would be straightforward: It is harder for teachers to provide students with care in low-income schools than in high-income schools. However, other stories appear to defy this narrative, requiring a more nuanced understanding of how teachers experience their work in unequal school contexts. The story of Judy Barlow presented below raises new questions for this research and provides a different perspective on Gloria's and Andrew's experiences. Rather than feeling burnt out in her work with low-income students of color and believing that these children lacked motivation, Judy, a teacher at the third school I studied, celebrated her work with this particular population.

\* \* \*

In terms of both physical layout and student demographics, Unity High School was remarkably similar to Bunker HS. The two-story, turn of the century school building was situated at the front of the campus, and smaller buildings lined an open quad in the back. High wrought-iron fences surrounded the campus and separated the teachers' parking lot from areas of student access, though these were fewer than at Bunker HS – no fences cut through the campus, and the sprawling grassy area in front of the main building was open to the street rather than enclosed by a second fence. In terms of geographic location, however, Unity had more in common with Prestige HS. Located just two miles from Prestige, Unity had served the students who lived in that nearby wealthy neighborhood until the 1960s, when Prestige was opened as a refuge for wealthy whites who fled the growing African American and Japanese populations at Unity HS.

When I interviewed Judy Barlow, a 57 year-old white art teacher with 15 years of experience, she asked me if we could chat in her classroom as she packed for summer renovations to the building. This was no easy task – the room was a large, warehouse-style space filled with artists' tools including a kiln and potters' wheel and art by students as well as from Judy's personal collection – and Judy wasn't happy about it. She complained,

I've moved seven times. And now I'm going to have to do that again starting tomorrow... I've put this classroom together tons of times for free. I've put in thousands of hours, which teachers do – you can't teach unless you put this free time in... You invest your life because in my estimation, my understanding of this job – it's not a job. It's a lifestyle. And I think that's what the politicians miss, is that we don't leave in June and then check out of teaching and then come back in September and punch a button and we're back in it – we're carrying it with us the whole time.

Despite her current dedication to teaching, Judy had not always imagined she would be a teacher in the high school she once attended as a student. When she graduated from Unity High School in the late 1960s, she was ready to move on. Throughout her twenties, she worked various jobs while establishing herself as an artist; she earned a teaching credential alongside her degree in art as a fallback. After her own children were old enough to enroll in local public schools, the art teacher at her alma mater contacted her to announce his retirement and request that she take over the job. At the time of our interview, Judy had taught at Unity HS for 15 years and involved herself



in “just about everything on campus,” volunteering for administrative duties and sponsoring student organizations.

During our interview, Judy wasn’t shy about sharing both the positives and the negatives of working at Unity HS. On the negative side, Judy was frustrated by administrative decisions she felt were based on politics and by the school’s poor reputation among some school board and community members. Overall, however, Judy felt that her school was on the right track following a recent administrative reorganization. Working alongside other teachers who shared a similar sense of purpose, Judy took great joy in helping young people from disadvantaged backgrounds realize their own creativity and find a path to college or a career. Describing her pride in the school, she said:

If you look at our demographics, our school has the highest percentage of Special Education [in the district], English Language Learners, kids from social things – either group homes, single parent families, living with grandmother, whatever it is. Our kids have deficits. We move ‘em forward, man. We send ‘em to college. And they leave empowered... Wow, here I am this kid, maybe I’m not even documented – and a lot of our kids aren’t – but they’re giving me skills that I’m going to be able to take out into the workforce... Our kids won [a regional engineering competition]. This is Unity [HS]! Our kids are great.

Despite entering high school with educational “deficits,” Unity students, in Judy’s view, were “great” because they were willing partners in their own development. Some students entered her classroom with self-doubt, uncertain of their own artistic abilities and wary of using unfamiliar tools. However, Judy was gratified to watch her students discover and expand their own capacities for growth during their time in her classroom. In order to “empower” her students and facilitate growth, Judy told me:

There has to be this personalization. If you don't get close to the kids, it doesn't matter. You’ve got to have that relationship. They do not care what you know – you’ve heard this before – until they know that you care... The first day of school, there’s this little old white lady here. What can she teach me? So it takes a little time. But by the end of the year, they get it. They see, oh, there is something that can be offered by someone I didn't anticipate, and I like that that's something they can take away with them because then that teaches them something about life. It’s critical.

Shifting the discussion from the life lessons her students learned in her classroom to the personal lessons she gained from teaching, Judy added:

In many cases, people can say that they’re not racist or they’re not bigoted, but I’m sorry, when you... go to school in Amapola Unified School District [where Unity HS is located]... you learn that we are all human... So I’m happy that I’m in this situation, where I get to be a piece of that. You know, the kids see me, I see them. I thought it was like that as a student coming up, but as a teacher I really know – we’re just all in this together.

\* \* \*

Judy Barlow provides a counter-narrative to the common understanding that teachers who work with low-income students become burnt out. Judy's story was one of a dedicated teacher who invested substantial personal time in her school and her students. Like Andrew's classroom, Judy's was well equipped with the tools her students needed, though this reflected investments made by Judy, not by wealthy parents. Judy was not burnt out on her work, though she expressed frustration with school bureaucracy and with the stigmatization of her school by the local community. Instead, the joy she took in her students extended beyond academic achievement to their personal growth, which Judy viewed as a "critical" part of her job. Beyond this, it is clear that Judy also invested in her *own* development, learning lessons about racial equality through her work with students. Rather than evaluating her students' worth through individualized measures of achievement, Judy believed that "we're just all in this together."

Is Judy Barlow a caring "hero" when compared with Gloria Agu, who struggled to find energy as she worked with a similar population of students? Would it make sense to reward Judy with "merit pay" and to punish Gloria? And where does Andrew Stetler fit into this picture of teachers in unequal schools? Is his enthusiasm for students with the resources to travel around the world qualitatively similar to Judy's excitement at the workplace skills gained by her undocumented students? What does it mean for their subjective experience of teaching that Andrew's resources were provided by wealthy parents while Judy's required intensive personal investment?

Reflecting on these three stories together allows us to observe some similarities in Gloria, Andrew, and Judy's narratives. For all three of these teachers, teaching was a *relational practice* that they were dedicated to and to which their self-image was inextricably bound. Judy stated this explicitly, when she said that her work was "not a job. It's a lifestyle"; this was also true for Gloria and Andrew. Andrew left a career in medical research because he found it morally troubling, instead choosing to reinforce his self-image as a "people person" by working with students. Gloria became a teacher because of the esteem she had for her own teachers when she was a child, and she was rewarded by personal connections with students. All three of these respondents had unique biographies as, respectively, an artist, a biochemist, and a lifelong educator who had migrated transnationally, but as teachers, they shared a dependence on their students to give moral meaning to their work and to provide them with psychic rewards. That is, they experienced teaching as more than just imparting information. For these three individuals, teaching was a form of care.

Gloria, Andrew, and Judy differed less in their individual motivation for teaching than in the *context* of their work. Each taught in a school with a unique history of school segregation and a distinctive mode of professional organization among teachers. These factors created particular *contexts for care* that circumscribed some types of caring relationships between teachers and their students while promoting others. Taking seriously Judy's contention that teaching is not "just a job" but a "lifestyle" through which teachers develop self-understandings, in this research, I studied variations in teachers' subjective experiences, their relationships, their emotions, and their perceptions of their work. How did variations in these unequal school contexts affect *when, how, for whom, and how much* care teachers were able to provide to their students? What were

the consequences for teachers' emotional and cognitive responses to their work with school-age youth?

This dissertation is guided by the question: How do school organizations situated within a structure of school inequality influence teachers' ability to engage in deeply meaningful relations of care with their students? Starting from the theoretical standpoint that care involves both an attitude of concern and the activity of helping others (Tronto 1987; Ruddick 1998), I argue that while individual teachers indeed vary in their enthusiasm for their work and their students, good teaching requires a complex set of practices oriented toward the flourishing of students. How teachers care, the emotional rewards they reap from care, and whether that caring activity is supportive or abusive to students differs among individuals. As suggested by the three vignettes above, however, these factors may also vary, systematically, across different school organizations that are influenced by the structuring of race and class inequality in education.

### **Unequal Contexts for Care**

Scholars have long acknowledged that teaching involves not just the delivery of knowledge but also the development of emotional relationships between teachers and their students. In the classic study, *Schoolteacher*, Dan Lortie (1975) identified three types of rewards stemming from the work of teaching: extrinsic rewards (e.g., income, prestige, power), ancillary rewards (objective factors of teaching that can confer subjective benefits, such as a convenient schedule), and psychic/intrinsic rewards. This last category of rewards is entirely subjective, and because teachers felt more control over variations in psychic or intrinsic rewards, Lortie found that teachers invested a great deal of energy in trying to realize them. Psychic/intrinsic rewards to teaching can be reaped through instrumental measures of student progress (Bullough and Gitlin 1984) and/or from positive emotional responses from students (Hargreaves 2000; Williams-Johnson, Cross et al. 2008). In both cases, teachers depend on students to draw subjective satisfaction from their work and to develop a sense that they are doing a "good job" (Lortie 1975; Vanderstraeten 2007).

Beyond depending on students' emotional and academic *performances* for validation, the work of teaching involves the formation of significant relationships between teachers and their students, relationships that imbue teachers' work with personal meaning. R.W. Connell (1985:117) argued that emotional demands are not an "incidental aspect" of teachers' work or a "precondition" of teaching; instead, "emotional relationships *are* [teachers'] work, and managing them is a large part of [the] labor process" [emphasis in the original]. Likewise, schoolteacher and scholar Sonia Nieto (2003) asserted that love is central to the process of teaching. She did not make this claim to idealize teaching but rather to refer to the intense caring that is necessarily required of successful teachers:

Teaching is about love because it involves trust and respect and because at its best, it depends on close and special relationships between students and teachers. It is, in a word, a vocation based on love. But rather than a maudlin emotion, love is a blend of confidence, faith, and admiration for students, and an appreciation for the strengths they bring with them. In this sense, love is visible through teachers' daily work (Nieto 2003:391).

Nieto's description of teaching as a "vocation based on love" may appear to sentimentalize the relationships that emerge between teachers and their students. Moreover, the notion that teachers express confidence, faith, and admiration for their students may contradict our personal experiences with teachers who doubted or derogated their young students, experiences that tend to be more common among poor or working class students and students of color (Delpit 2006). This dissonance between Nieto's description and our personal experiences of imperfect teachers is generated by a cultural confusion between two definitions of care. On the one hand, we understand care as an *ideal* of perfect engrossment in the wellbeing of another; on the other hand, care is any *action* taken to provide for the needs of another (Noddings 1984). Setting aside care-as-ideal for the moment, to focus on care-as-action, one can see that care is both a prerequisite of instruction and deeply intertwined with the work of teaching. Students' basic physiological and emotional needs must be met if they are to receive instruction; and to participate in learning, they must trust their teachers to meet their academic needs.

Rather than idealize the teacher-student relationship, I argue that the relational work of teaching is similar in quality and in emotional demands to the class of occupations often described as "paid care work" (Himmelweit 1999). This class of occupations includes jobs such as nursing home attendant, daycare provider, and hospital nurse. Paid care work involves activities that provide for the emotional and physical needs of clients who are in a position of social or physical dependency (Bubeck 1995). In these occupations, as in teaching, relationships between caregivers and clients involve reciprocity (Abel and Nelson 1990) as well as moments of anger, disgust, and frustration in addition to joy and laughter (Lundgren and Browner 1990). Excellent care approaches the ideal of "confidence, faith, and admiration" (Nieto 2003); a failure to care can manifest as hostility, abuse, or neglect. Most real caregiving relationships fall along a spectrum between these two extremes.

For all teachers, caring as an activity is a daily part of their work, regardless of whether they succeed or fail in this respect. In addition, however, many teachers I interviewed chose their work because they embraced care as an *ideal* as well. These teachers, like those in Sonia Nieto's (2003) inquiry group, viewed caring for students as a moral and ethical project that requires active thought, participation, and practice. Whereas Dan Lortie (1975) was vague about the intrinsic/ancillary rewards of teaching, the teachers I spoke with linked such rewards to practices of care. These rewards included feeling successful in teaching as a moral project: experiencing themselves as becoming "better," more caring persons; achieving a sense of joy and energy from engaging with youth; seeing evidence of students' academic and personal development; and receiving gratitude from others including students, parents, and other teachers. Teachers invested time, money, emotion, and self in their caring because doing so allowed them to reap these rewards.

The types of investments teachers made and the caring relationships they were able to build through these relationships were heavily influenced by their school contexts, however. For the teachers I studied, school inequality was a major factor shaping the contours of their stances and practices of care. Public school teachers currently work in a system that is highly segregated by race and class, with inequalities deepening over time (Orfield and Lee 2005). Substantial research has shown that teachers who work with schools serving large low-income, non-white student populations face limited material

resources (Oakes and Saunders 2004). Because these schools are perceived as less desirable places to work, they tend to have teachers with the least experience and training (Oakes 2004). Teachers who work in these schools may also face social challenges to and material constraints on their care; multiple studies document that teachers enter these schools with biases against low-income students and students of color and/or lack of familiarity with the particular needs and cultural styles of their students (Alexander, Entwistle et al. 1987; Oates 2003; Downey 2004; Lynn, Bacon et al. 2010). Some studies have even shown teachers of low-income students of color to be openly hostile or abusive to these youth (Becker 1952; Anyon 1997; Tyson 2003).

Despite substantial previous research documenting fraught social relationships between public school teachers and their low-income students of color, only one study thus far has examined these relations in terms of care. In *Subtractive Schooling*, an ethnography of a low-income and working class Mexican and Mexican American high school, Angela Valenzuela (1999) used care as a theoretical framework to analyze interactions where teachers devalued low-income students of color. Valenzuela found that although most of the teachers she spoke with articulated concern for their students, teachers ultimately collaborated with a school system that devalued students' cultural and linguistic heritage, systematically divesting youth of important resources rather than investing in their educational and personal development. This disconnect between teachers' articulated concern and their teaching practices was related to differences in teachers' and students' understandings of "caring." Teachers operated under a frame of *aesthetic caring*, expecting students to demonstrate an abstract "commitment to ideas or practices that purportedly lead to achievement" (Valenzuela 1999:61). In contrast, students were "committed to an *authentic* form of caring that emphasizes relations of reciprocity between teachers and students" (*ibid*).

Valenzuela's study is a critical example of how teachers' relationships with their students are embedded within particular contexts of care. At the high school Valenzuela studied, relationships between students and teachers and among students were limited by the organization of care at the school site. A disjuncture between school-institutional definitions of care and students' need for authentic engagement with teachers not only created negative consequences for youth who felt disconnected from school but also limited the psychic/intrinsic rewards reaped by teachers.

The teachers at the school Valenzuela studied embraced a particular form of care that impeded their ability to foster supportive relationships with students. However, there is evidence that this may not be true of public school teachers of low-income, non-white students in general, since some studies document deep personal and cultural connections between school teachers and their low-income students of color (Gay 2000; Delpit 2006; Ladson-Billings 2009). Some school cultures may in fact foster positive representations of students and practices of *authentic* caring; studies have shown that anti-racist interactions among faculty can support teachers' positive perceptions of racial-ethnic minority students (Metz 1983; Achinstein and Barrett 2004). In a study of teachers' perceptions of professionalism and student social class, Reba Page (1987) found that the culture of one school she studied supported positive perceptions of lower and middle class students while the other did not. She concluded that "teachers' definitions of students reflect the culture of the educational organization and are, simultaneously, one of its defining elements" (Page 1987:89). Thus, as in other paid care work organizations,

some schools may be organized “to create structural opportunities for meaningful social relationships between caregivers and clients” while others discourage authentic attachment in favor of heavily scripted instrumental interactions (Lopez 2006: 134).

While individual schools may influence teachers in ways that vary across organizations based upon the particular administrative structure of the school and the culture among teachers, Valenzuela made an important theoretical point about inequality that must be kept in mind in the study of caring in unequal schools. Acknowledging the difficult position of the teachers she studied, Valenzuela (1999:70) commented that “teachers occupy an uncomfortable middle ground. They are both victims of and collaborators with a system that structurally neglects Latino youth.” This is true not only for the teachers in her study, but all teachers who are concerned with the personal wellbeing and educational advancement of young people but work in a school system that systematically underserves students of disadvantaged race and class backgrounds. Comparative research on unequal schools is needed to better understand how teacher caring is influenced both by the particular conditions of schools that are shaped by inequality and the experience of working in an inequitable school system.

### **Research Statement**

To study how schools create or restrict structural opportunities for meaningful caring between teachers and students, I interviewed teachers in three unequal high schools within the same metropolitan area. In the interviews, I asked them to share their subjective experiences of the material, social, and organizational conditions in which they worked. Using this data, I ask how the particular conditions of each school (which I also documented using other empirical sources), as well as the broader structure of school inequality under modern-day conditions of race and class segregation, affected the objective and subjective investments that teachers made in their students as individuals and in their school as an organization. Engaging in this study of teachers’ care opens insight into how the adults most intimately connected with unequal educational conditions and student disadvantage: (1) bear the psychic weight of racist and class-inflected social policies and processes; (2) reap psychic rewards from relationships with various populations of students and parents; and (3) cognitively handle the contradictions of working within a system of schooling that systematically privileges some students while disadvantaging others.

### **Three Schools, Three Contexts for Care**

This dissertation is based on in-depth interviews conducted with teachers in the spring and summer of 2011. Before recruiting for these interviews, I began my research by conducting exploratory interviews with teachers across schools in Southern California that varied in race and class characteristics to learn about variations in collegial relations and student-teacher relationships. This data did not make it into the dissertation; however, the process allowed me to locate three schools that varied in distinctive ways, to generate comparative insight into schools as contexts of care and into the link between care and unequal conditions across schools. From these preliminary conversations, I discovered that teachers often explained the particular conditions of their school by relating school histories, especially histories of local contention and of white flight. Teachers also often described their school in relation to its reputation in the larger community and to the political dynamics in the school district.

To engage in a study of school inequality that took into account the factors of history and local context that appeared important to teachers, my final sample included three schools. Two of the schools I selected served low-income students with a Latino majority and an African American minority; one of the schools served wealthy students with a white majority and an Asian American minority. Each of the three schools was located in a different suburban school district in Los Angeles County, and all three had distinct histories of white flight that contributed to their current demographics and their local political dynamics. Bunker High School represented a school shaped by inter-city white flight, where, at the time of my study, the majority of the city's population was comprised of low-income persons of color. Middle-class African Americans controlled the local political structure. Unity High School was shaped by intra-city white flight from public schools, beginning in the 1960s. At the time of my study, it was located in a socioeconomically and racially diverse city where local public schools were populated by a large majority of low-income students of color, and the local political structure was dominated by middle and upper class whites. Finally, to capture advantage as well as disadvantage in segregated schooling, I chose to study Prestige High School, a school that was created explicitly to isolate students in a wealthy white enclave with district boundaries that separated them from their lower-income African American and Latino neighbors. In addition to attending to these histories, I chose schools that represented the changing complexion of racial and cultural segregation in California; all three schools had experienced a large influx of immigrants from Latin American and/or Asia within the last three decades.

After selecting these three schools, I recruited teachers to interview by putting invitation letters in their boxes at school and sending messages to their school email addresses. Through this method, I recruited a sample of approximately 20 teachers at each school; each sample roughly captured the configuration of racial-ethnic and class backgrounds among the teachers in each context, though African American teachers were overrepresented in my sample from Unity High and underrepresented in my sample at Bunker High. All but two of the teachers I interviewed at Prestige identified as white.<sup>2</sup>

Once a teacher agreed to participate in the project, we met for an in-depth, semi-structured interview that usually lasted about 2 hours. The open-ended interview questions covered a broad range of topics, including the teacher's personal background, educational and work history, perceptions of the school as a workplace, teaching philosophy, relationships with students and other teachers, and thoughts about school inequality and educational policy. With my respondents' permission, I digitally recorded our conversations and later transcribed the files for analysis. This research process was approved by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at UC Berkeley.

Despite similarities among the schools I studied in terms of the metropolitan area in which they were located, each of the three high schools I studied presented remarkably different organizational contexts within which teachers experienced and understood their work. **Bunker High School** (where Gloria Agu worked) served a low-income, majority Latino and African American student population. When the school was founded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Silverwood was home to a middle-class white community.

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<sup>2</sup> For more data on my recruitment, sample, and interview techniques, see the methodological appendix.

However, following the abolition of restrictive covenants in 1948, African Americans were able to purchase homes in Silverwood with income generated by the WWII manufacturing boom in Los Angeles. After a brief period of violence and intimidation in the 1950s, white flight from Bunker was rapid and complete. Silverwood thrived as a working and middle-class African American suburb until the late 1960s, when the manufacturing industry bottomed out in Los Angeles. With more than one-third of its population employed in manufacturing, Silverwood was severely crippled by the loss of well-paying blue-collar jobs for men. In recent years, this low-income suburb experienced a large influx of migrants, primarily from Mexico and Central America, as well as smaller waves of immigrants from the Pacific islands and South America.

At the time of my research, Bunker HS was marked by organizational dysfunction that led to mistrust among teachers and a sense of futility regarding administrative improvement. I call the school “Bunker” because the teachers felt isolated in their classrooms, where they attempted to provide students with a refuge from the chaos that characterized their school and community. I drew the war imagery evoked by the name Bunker from Donna Francis, an African American science teacher at the school, who commented that working at the school was like “you’re fighting your own little mini-battle in your classroom and you’ve got this huge-scale war going on outside that you’re only a little bit a part of, so you don’t feel like you’re really being successful.”

Although **Unity High School** (where Judy Barlow worked) shared social class and racial demographics similar to those of Bunker, due to both recent and long-term developments at the school, teachers had created a strong collegial culture that supported a sense that they were working together to provide students with opportunities for upward mobility. I chose the name “Unity” for this high school to describe how teachers experienced their relationships with one other and with their students as well as to refer to the defiant manner in which teachers embraced their neighborhood and their school in the face of external stigmatization. Unity High School was located in the racially and socioeconomic diverse city of Amapola, which was marked by a history of internal segregation across high schools in the district. In the late 1960s, a group of Unity High School parents filed suit to desegregate the district, and they won. Following the court decision to implement bussing, most white middle and upper class parents withdrew their students from public schools in favor of private schools,<sup>3</sup> a phenomenon that has persisted in Amapola over the past 40 years.

Because of the city’s history of segregation and the school’s location in the neighborhood with the highest concentration of low-income families of color, Unity teachers perceived their school as stigmatized by members of the district school board, the local newspaper, and white Amapolans. Despite believing that others looked down on the high school, Unity teachers drew upon their cohesive faculty culture to cultivate a defiant pride in their school and in their students. Unity HS teachers were invested heavily in improving the performance of the school and in creating opportunities for educational mobility for their students.

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<sup>3</sup> Between 1970 and 1973, an estimated 7,000 white students, or 40% of the white public school population, left public schools for existing and newly opened private schools. Though the mandate on busing officially ended in 1976, whites who fled Amapola public schools never returned



The third school I studied was **Prestige High School** (where Andrew Stetler worked). Prestige High School was linked to Unity High School by a shared history. In addition to segregation within Amapola and intra-city white flight into private schools, Unity experienced a smaller wave of white flight to a nearby, unincorporated area in the early 1960s. At this point, families in a wealthy white neighborhood I call Juniper chose to incorporate as a small city and to create their own school system. Though Prestige was located less than two miles from Unity, at the time of my study, the two schools were a world apart in demographic terms. The population of Prestige HS remained majority white, though with a large Asian American minority, and the student body was marked by wealth rather than poverty. The median income of Juniper was more than three times that for the state of California, and the school raised over a million dollars through parent donations each year.

I call this high school “Prestige” because of its strong emphasis on academic achievement as a form of social status. Prestige High School was ranked among the top schools in the state in terms of student test scores and college matriculation rates, a point that was a source of pride for many teachers. However, teachers also worried that students who were not top performers were not given appropriate attention at their school, and that the focus on achievement as status led to low self-esteem for these students. Prestige teachers generally shared friendly collegial relationships that were not emotionally close, which placed their faculty culture midway between the close, familial relations among teachers at Unity HS and the disorganization that characterized Bunker HS.

In this dissertation, I explore the implications of deepening class and racial segregation in public schooling through case studies of three schools that are situated in the same metropolitan area but operate under starkly different and historically segregated material and social conditions. How do the practices of teachers tend to reproduce as well as help challenge unequal schooling? How do the material and organizational conditions of segregated schools help shape the subjective experiences of teachers and the ways in which they engage in caring practices on behalf of and with their students? Pursuing these kinds of questions through detailed comparisons of teachers’ work within three different schools allows me to open the “black box” of schools that has plagued theories of reproduction to explore how privilege and disadvantage may be experienced, reproduced, and challenged within *emotional* relationships between teachers and their students.

### **Chapter Organization**

I open this comparative study of teachers’ care work in three public high schools by describing the histories of white flight and school class and race segregation in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, especially in the communities where I conducted my research. In Chapter Two, I argue that “white flight” should not be viewed as a discrete historical event, nor as an ethnically homogenizing process. Instead, I draw upon critical theories of race and on data from studies of segregation in Los Angeles to show how the administration of public schooling through locally controlled school districts facilitates the segregation of students based on class and racial-ethnicity. Through this segregation, conditions of social and material disadvantage are produced, maintained, and reproduced in communities of color while white communities are able to maintain their privilege through the organization of neighborhoods and schools – a phenomenon I refer to as

“quarantined disadvantage.” This discussion of concentrated social advantage/disadvantage concludes with a presentation of the *objective* social and material conditions of the three schools I studied.

Chapter Three presents the material, organizational, and social conditions of the three schools I studied as they were subjectively experienced by the teachers I interviewed. I use the concept of school-as-workspace to describe these schools as not only physical places, but also spaces constituted by the meanings and ideologies shared by participants within them. In addition to discussing general themes that emerged across the interviews with regard to cultures among colleagues and school strengths and challenges, I explore “flashpoints,” or particular incidents that were widely narrated by teachers because they captured a larger set of conflicts that affected how teachers understood their work within their particular school settings. This chapter describes the underlying social and structural conditions of each school, providing background for later discussions of how teachers responded to these unique settings.

Chapter Four discusses how various teachers navigated the racialized and social-class-inflected settings of the three high schools, in patterns marked by feelings of pride and shame. Because Bunker HS and Unity HS were stigmatized as intensely segregated minority schools, teachers in these two schools had to contend with the threat of shaming from outsiders. Unity HS teachers were able to draw upon close, collegial relationships and a racially inclusive school history to cultivate an anti-racist school pride in response to the shame of stigmatization. Conversely, Bunker HS teachers experienced deep racial mistrust of one another as a result of fragmented school relationships and a local history where insider/outsider status fell along clear racial lines. At Prestige High School, teachers were able to avoid segregation as a potential source of shame by eliding race privilege and legitimating their students’ cultural and economic capital as produced by class advantage. I discuss the repercussions of these approaches to dealing with race and class in terms of teachers’ responses to shifts in student demographics and their ability to foster positive school identification for non-white students.

Chapters Five and Six both explore how school contexts shaped teachers’ care. Chapter Five provides a broad exploration of the emotional dimensions of working in these unequal schools. In this chapter, I present data on teachers’ investments in their school and in their students, which they used to reap the emotional rewards of engaging in work that was personally and socially meaningful. The nature of these investments, and the corresponding rewards, varied greatly across schools. At Prestige HS, high-status students and their families limited the potential for deep interconnectedness. At both Unity HS and Bunker HS, teachers felt themselves to be deeply engaged with their students, but only at Unity were most teachers able to understand this engagement as serving a broader social purpose.

Chapter Six narrows the focus to three teachers whose experiences poignantly illustrate how schools as contexts of care affect investments in students and the rewards teachers reap. Each of these teachers sought to find their work meaningful by creating a communal approach to teaching and learning, and all three believed that teaching should ameliorate inequality and other social ills. However, only the Unity High School teacher was adequately supported in this project by her school context.

In Chapter Seven, I return to teachers’ comments about student “motivation.” Noting that teachers often locate the family as the source of trouble with student

“motivation,” I use complaints about student motivation and about students’ families to explore teachers’ expectations for families. Drawing comparisons across all three schools, I find that these expectations have much in common, embedding ideas about “institutionally appropriate families.” I argue that schools, as institutions, are predicated on implicit understandings about how families must provide for their children’s needs. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of teachers’ attempts to bridge the gap between institutional expectations for the families and the lived experience of their students. Especially in the case of Unity High School teachers, these attempts provide an alternative model of school institutions that serves to ameliorate, rather than reproduce, social inequality.

In the conclusion to the dissertation, I discuss the implications of my findings for educational policy. While the findings regarding school organization and collegiality are more easily interpretable into policy solutions, findings regarding the social and cultural meanings of quarantined disadvantage and the ability of teachers to meet their students’ care needs are far more complicated. Drawing on Gloria Ladson-Billing’s (2006) notion of the “education debt,” I argue that due to the history of racism and class oppression in the US, low-income students and students of color suffer social deficits of care that are unevenly shared within our educational system. Though teachers often work hard to meet these deficits, students will not flourish until we begin to envision broader and more equal methods of providing care for youth in the United States.

## Chapter Two

### Quarantined Disadvantage: Needs and Resources in Unequal Schools

Nearly sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, white students in the US are increasingly isolated from their African American and Latino peers, a trend that has been labeled “resegregation” (Orfield and Eaton 1996). School resegregation has occurred through various means, including neighborhood segregation (Reardon and Yun 2001), increased use of private schools, charters, and magnets by white families (Saporito and Sohoni 2006; 2007), and the end of many school district desegregation practices (Orfield and Eaton 1996). Regardless of the method of resegregation, by the mid-1990s, integration had been effectively eliminated from the legislative toolkit despite strong evidence that the goals of *Brown* were still unmet.

There are some important differences between modern-day segregated schools and those of Jim Crow. Today, school segregation is not limited to the rural South but rather is prevalent throughout the U.S., with strong segregation in major metropolitan areas such as Chicago, New York, Houston, and Los Angeles (Reardon and Yun 2001). Within these areas, residential and school segregation involve not only the “chocolate city-vanilla suburb” divide (Farley, Schuman et al. 1979), but also segregation across suburban areas. In addition, recent waves of immigration from Asia and Latin America necessitate moving beyond a Black-white paradigm when picturing segregated schools.

Through all of the changes between pre-*Brown* segregated schools and the segregation of today, one area of consistency has been the stark inequities faced by students in schools where the majority of students are non-white. In 2004, 88% of intensely segregated minority schools<sup>4</sup> had student populations where the majority qualified for free or reduced lunches. In contrast, only 15% of intensely segregated white schools had student populations where the majority were eligible for such assistance (Orfield and Lee 2006). Within low-income, majority non-white schools, students confront challenges, such as fewer experienced teachers and limited access to textbooks and technology, that are distant from the experiences of their higher-income white peers. Simply put:

We have a system of residential segregation in most of our metropolitan areas that often approaches the level of segregation produced by the old apartheid laws. This system, together with the policies and practices of the school systems, produces highly segregated and increasingly unequal education for minority students (Orfield and Eaton 1996:50).

How does this context of public schooling, where racial-ethnic minority status is increasingly coupled with poverty and school disadvantage, affect the work of teachers? What kinds of needs do teachers see in their students, and what kinds of care do they provide to students in schools differently positioned in segregated terrains? How does an overarching structure of inequality across schools shape teachers’ understanding of their work?

To address these important empirical questions, I had to develop a conceptual framework to understand how segregated schooling was historically produced, and how the dynamics of separate and unequal schools are maintained over time. In this chapter, I

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<sup>4</sup> Schools where 90-100% of the population is non-white.

propose the concept of “quarantined disadvantage.” By examining the history of the last century of schooling in Southern California, especially focused on dynamics of white flight, I discovered that instead of schooling systems cannot be properly understood through binaries of *de facto/de jure* or segregation/desegregation. Instead, racial contestation and the maintenance of white privilege have historically been part of the “normal dynamics” of schooling in the U.S., involving judicial, extra-legal, and illegal means (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Barajas and Ronnkvist 2007). Reinforcing and reproducing the privileges of middle class and wealthy white populations, schools have not only persistently segregated racialized bodies, but also sources of educational disadvantage such as poverty, limited social networks, and overburdened family structures that are the consequences of racial oppression and class inequality. I use the term “quarantined disadvantage” to refer to the actions undertaken by many middle-class and wealthy white families to avoid contact with the educational disadvantages accruing to low-income, racial minority youth, as if they were contaminants that might spoil the life chances of white children. In this way, many white families exercise the privilege of maintaining exclusive access to high-quality educational resources. Moving beyond the reductive term “resegregation,” I use “quarantined disadvantage” to refer to the intertwining of race and class inequalities in modern schools, to refer to the ongoing preservation of white privilege even as large waves of immigrant children enter U.S. schools, and to refer to the stark inequities of students’ educational *needs* that are present across public schools.

The concept of “quarantined disadvantage” foregrounds my empirical discussion of teachers in unequal schools. This concept suggests not only how teachers might experience students’ needs differently in different schools (and therefore respond with different types of care) but also how the particular experiences of teachers may provide insight into processes of social reproduction. Before moving into the empirical data, however, I first provide background for the concept of quarantined disadvantage by exploring the history of school segregation in L.A. County. The historical record reflects that particular micro-histories of white flight resulted in unique conditions of segregation by racial-ethnicity and class across and within neighborhoods in the diverse “heteropolis” of Los Angeles (Jencks 1993). Examining segregation as a dynamic process rather than a historical event, the record shows that schools (in conjunction with municipalities, real estate developers, and other actors) have preserved and reproduced white privilege through the spatial isolation of educational disadvantages associated with class inequality and racism. Because educational advantages and disadvantages are unequally distributed across schools, at each school I studied, teachers had to address a different set of student needs by drawing on a unique set of social and material resources. In this chapter, I present objective measures of the needs and resources at each school; subsequent chapters draw on teachers’ subjective experiences of giving care within the different contexts of quarantined disadvantage (or advantage) at Bunker, Prestige, and Unity High Schools.

### **School Segregation in Los Angeles**

Los Angeles’s long and contentious history of residential and school segregation blurs the boundaries between *de facto* and *de jure*, with shifting patterns of exclusion for students of multiple racial-ethnic groups. Whereas Southern Jim Crow segregation was based in the deeply entrenched racialized-caste system of slavery, in California, school segregation was one of many mechanisms through which whites established dominance

in a region only recently annexed into the United States and populated by diverse groups, including native indigenous groups and Mexicans and immigrants from China, Japan, Latin America, and across the US (Delgado and Stefancic 2000). Thus, beginning in 1885, the California school code explicitly provided for the segregation of students with “Chinese, Japanese, or Mongolian parentage,” and the state’s broadest experiment in school segregation involved the establishment of 64 “Mexican Schools” across Southern California that focused on “Americanization” (Torres-Rouff 2012).

The creation and maintenance of Mexican Schools in the first few decades of the 1900s had a dual purpose. First, progressive activists believed that separate schooling was necessary for the moral and cultural instruction of Mexican youth to achieve assimilation into US society (Wollenberg 1976). Second, white parents and administrators utilized school segregation to preserve the best school facilities, teachers, and funds for white students in regions of Southern California where the Mexican American population was growing alongside white neighborhoods (Torres-Rouff 2012). Arguing that such segregation was beneficial to children regarded as poor and culturally deficient, in the early 1900s, associations of parents, teachers, school administrators, and school board members took the lead in establishing new (and inferior) school facilities to house Mexican/Mexican American students who had previously attended integrated schools. In advocating for the segregation of these students, white parents “made a distinction between the ‘special’ needs of their own children versus those of Mexican pupils” (Torres-Rouff 2012:102).

The practice of segregating students into Mexican Schools ended in 1947. In a precursor to *Brown v. Board of Education*, five Mexican American fathers filed suit against their Orange County school districts to end this practice in the case of *Mendez v. Westminster*. The ninth circuit court ruled that the segregation of Mexican students was prohibited under the limited finding that California law only provided for the segregation of students of Asian descent; however, all *de jure* school segregation was repealed later that year by Governor Earl Warren.

Prescient of *Brown*, the lawsuit had little effect on school segregation overall because, aside from the particular case of Mexican schools, the vast majority of school segregation in California was the result of residential segregation. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most African American and many Latino youth in the Los Angeles area were prevented from attending school with white students not because of explicit school policies mandating segregation but rather due to a combination of restrictive racial covenants in housing and a school transfer policy within Los Angeles Unified School District that favored petitions from white families (LAUSD). While African American homeownership was higher in Los Angeles than in most other regions of the US at the time, the availability of property was based less on racial tolerance than on the accessibility of space in sprawling Southern California. Described by one Black Angeleno in 1917 as “invisible walls of steel,” racial covenants ensured that African Americans, and in many places, Mexican and Japanese Americans as well, would contribute to public coffers through property taxes but would not enjoy equal access to the superior public resources of white neighborhoods (Sides 2003:17). These walls were not erected between minority groups, however; unlike some other major U.S. cities, most African Americans in Los Angeles lived in racial-ethnically diverse communities that included Mexican, Italians, and Japanese Americans. Thus, in 1940, over 20,000

Mexican Americans lived in South Central alongside their African American neighbors (Sides 2003:18).

In 1948, in the case of *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the use of restrictive racial covenants, opening up opportunities for non-white homebuyers at the same time that the World War II manufacturing boom put new capital in the hands of working-class families. Despite discriminatory hiring practices that promoted whites into cleaner, higher paying jobs, the \$11 billion in war contracts that went to the Los Angeles region provided a rapidly growing population of African Americans with access to steady, well-paying work, especially for men (Sides 2003). Thus, at the same time that racial restrictions on home-buying collapsed, African American families had access to newfound wealth to purchase property. In addition, the discriminatory practices employed by developers and the Federal Housing Agency at the time led to the expansion of single family homes in white neighborhoods as multi-unit dwellings were eliminated in predominantly African American areas, leading to overcrowding and poor living conditions (Davis 1992). These three factors fostered the rapid influx of African Americans into formerly white neighborhoods. Whites responded through protest, intimidation, and violence followed by flight into suburban enclaves.

Whites who resisted neighborhood integration claimed that it threatened the “moral, aesthetic, and financial character of their neighborhoods” (Sides 2003:96).

Critically for the evolving patterns of school segregation:

Both moderate and extreme opponents almost universally shared the view that the most unsettling, if not dangerous, aspect of neighborhood integration was its effect on local schools. Most white parents did not want to subject their children to what they perceived as ‘experiments’ in integrated schools. This conflict between black ambitions and white ambitions ensured that long after racially restrictive housing covenants were declared unconstitutional, residential integration would proceed very slowly or, in many places, not at all (*ibid.*).

In “transitional” suburban communities with growing African American populations in the late 1950s and 60s, including Leimert Park, Inglewood, Hawthorne, Gardena, Compton, Huntington Park, and Southgate, these “experiments” briefly proved successful, as middle-class African American and white children attended high-performing schools together. However, rapid white flight re-segregated these suburban schools at the same time that expanding opportunities for other racial groups caused them to leave South Central and other former multiethnic neighborhoods.

The iconic “Black ghettos” of Los Angeles depicted in music videos and in recycled images from the 1965 Watts riots and the 1992 L.A. Riots are the product of very specific social, political, and economic dynamics that played out over space and time. Predominantly African American areas were created not only by spatial affinity between African Americans migrating to the city and their co-ethnics, but also, and in larger part, by direct and purposeful action by whites who worked to monopolize access over many of the public resources of the metropolitan area. The high concentrations of poverty that currently characterize areas such as Lynwood, Compton, Watts, and South Central clearly illustrate whites’ success in maintaining ownership over these resources despite an end to *de jure* segregation of California neighborhoods and schools in 1948.

The decline of the manufacturing economy in the 1970s was the nail in the coffin of prosperity for these once middle- and working-class African American communities. The negative effects of this economic shift were concentrated in African American neighborhoods for multiple political reasons: First, during and following the Second World War, “the Los Angeles city government consistently diverted municipal funds for traffic safety, sewage, and street repairs” from majority African American neighborhoods into white neighborhoods (Sides 2003:113). Second, declines in public transportation made it difficult for African American workers who lacked access to automobiles to commute outside their neighborhoods just at the time when “fiscal zoning... sucked hundreds of industries out of the heart of Los Angeles” and into outlying areas (Davis 1992:169). Third, L.A. city officials relaxed zoning restrictions in majority African American neighborhoods while white neighborhoods throughout the region passed “slow growth” regulations (*ibid.*). Together, these measures limited African Americans’ access to housing and jobs in areas outside of the central city and led to the deterioration of predominantly Black spaces even before the loss of manufacturing jobs caused disproportionate unemployment for African American men.

A decline in school quality could be anticipated from this economic drain on formerly prosperous African American communities, but another important historical development also contributed to the concentration of poverty in segregated, non-white schools. Between 1960 and 1980, white flight out of the Los Angeles city center, fueled by fears of school desegregation, was led by families with school-age children. These white families transformed the racial and economic demographics of the LA metropolitan area and its schools. Even before any major steps towards desegregation were taken in the Los Angeles area, “urban became synonymous with poor public education, and that perception, when acted upon, became a reality” (Schneider 2008:1008). Whites moved either out of Los Angeles and into newly developed border areas such as Orange County and Riverside or to a shrinking number of white enclave communities within LA County. Between 1960 and 1980, the proportion of white neighborhoods identified by the census bureau dropped from 71.8 percent to 44.2 percent (Schneider 2008:1007). Over 80,000 white students left LAUSD schools between 1966 and 1970 so that by the time the first LAUSD desegregation plan took effect in 1970, the district was no longer majority white (Schneider 2008:1008).

Of course, not all white families fled urban Los Angeles for suburban enclaves. Some white children attended magnet programs in LAUSD, and some remained in increasingly diverse public schools. A large number also chose to continue living in urban L.A. communities while sending their children to private schools. In the ‘60s and ‘70s, whites aged 5-19 fled public schools at even greater rates than they fled the city, suggesting that fears of school desegregation fueled trends in both residential and school white flight (Schneider 2008). The combination of two forms of white flight from diversifying Los Angeles schools – inter-district white flight to suburban enclaves and intra-district white flight to private schools – led to a dramatic decline in the white public school population at the same time that the non-white youth population in California was growing. Between 1966 and 1980, the white population in LAUSD schools declined by over two-thirds, from 396,654 to 127,281 white students (Schneider 2008:997).

White families’ access to exclusive suburban enclaves despite the end of restrictive racial covenants was based on multiple factors. First, real estate developers



and agents continued to participate in less overt practices of racial discrimination (Davis 1992). Second, African American families' access to capital to purchase real estate declined after World War II as discriminatory hiring practices in manufacturing were coupled with a decline in jobs (Sides 2003). Third, a *prima facie* race-neutral plan that enabled the incorporation of small cities in L.A. County advantaged white enclaves. Powerful developers designed the Lakewood Plan to allow small cities to incorporate as a way of controlling local zoning and land use while escaping the burdens of creating a city government by contracting services from L.A. municipal resources. At the same time, the Bradley Burns Act of 1965 allowed these cities to collect a 1% local sales tax for their own use. Together, the Lakewood Plan and the Bradley Burns Act reduced L.A.'s tax base while giving suburban homeowners

a subsidized exit option as well as a powerful new motive for organizing around the protection of their home values and lifestyles. The ensuing maximization of local advantage through incorporation and fiscal zoning – whether led by affluent homeowners or business factions – inevitably produced widening racial and income divides (Davis 1992:160).

Thus, in addition to concentrating the effects of the economic downturn in African American and Latino neighborhoods and schools, white flight also enhanced the wealth of white families through increases in property values and land inflation that disproportionately benefitted “desirable” neighborhoods. Because prior to the 1970s, California school districts were funded entirely by local property taxes, these differences between neighborhoods created vast inequalities in school resources. In the 1971 case of *Serrano v. Priest*, the California Supreme Court held that these funding disparities across school districts were unconstitutional. In response, the state began to redistribute property tax revenues across schools. To protect newly inflated tax resources in white neighborhoods, California homeowners passed Proposition 13, which capped property taxes in the state.

In the decade of the 1980s, the quality of California public schools declined precipitously. The decrease in available revenue caused by the passage of Proposition 13 meant that the primary source of school funding switched from property taxes to general state funds. Thus, the amount of funding available for schools varies greatly across years based on annual tax receipts. In 1988, voters passed Proposition 98, which established a base level of funding that the state must provide to schools in the annual budget. However, funding to public schools remains lower in California than in most other states, and public school performance plummeted in the state: in 1974 California ranked among the top five states for public education; currently, it ranks 49<sup>th</sup>. In addition, California's schools remain segregated by race and class, and resources are unevenly distributed across schools. Thus, despite a history far removed from the *de jure* segregation of the Jim Crow South, half a century of protracted divestment in African American and Latino students has led to the “Mississippification” of California Schools (Staples 2000).

Although the state is home to substantial and rapidly increasing student diversity, today, levels of racial-ethnic segregation are high in the California. According to data from the 2000 census, in Los Angeles county, 70.9% of African Americans and 64.4% Hispanics would have to move to a different geographic area to produce a spatial

distribution matching that of whites (Zhou 2003).<sup>5</sup> Put in other terms, Black-white segregation in Los Angeles County is five times its projected level if residential patterns were related to income, family type and size, and age of household head alone (Charles 2000:171). In the early 2000s, 89% of Latino and 87% of African American students in California attended majority non-white schools, placing California among the most segregated states (Orfield and Lee 2006). Many of these students attended what Gary Orfield and Chungmai Lee call “intensely segregated minority schools,” where 90-100% of the student body is non-white; in 2008, over 40% of Latino students and over 30% of African American students in California attended intensely segregated minority schools. Interestingly, however, in a return to the patterns of minority integration that were common in Los Angeles before the 1950s, African American and Latino students are also now likely to attend segregated schools *together*: The average African American student in California attends school with almost twice as many Latino students as African Americans (Orfield and Lee 2006:28).

As in the rest of the U.S., patterns of racial segregation in California are directly tied to concentrated poverty. Nationwide, Latino and African American students are three times as likely to be in high poverty schools and 12 times as likely as their white peers to be in schools where all students are poor. This link between racial-ethnicity and poverty has implications for school inequality. In a 2000 study of the relationships between student socioeconomic status, school resources, and student achievement released by the Public Policy Institute of California, the authors responded with a “resounding yes” to the question of whether disadvantaged children have fewer resources in their schools (Betts, Rueben et al. 2000:xiv). Low-income student of color attend schools with lower maintenance expenditures in California (Condrón and Roscigno 2003) and are more likely to face declining physical plants and unsafe health conditions (Oakes 2004). Teachers in schools with the most students eligible for welfare assistance are almost twice as likely as those with the lowest rates of eligibility to report that they lack sufficient books for their students to use at home (Oakes and Saunders 2004). Connected to these problems of maintenance and materials is the additional problem that schools with sizeable low-income, African American and Latino student populations tend to have teachers who are less experienced and less qualified than in other schools (Darling-Hammond 2004). These close connections among school racial composition, student poverty, and school disadvantage led Gary Orfield and Chungmai Lee (2005:29) to assert that:

Concentrated poverty is shorthand for a constellation of inequalities that shape schooling. These schools have less qualified, less experienced teachers, lower levels of peer group competition, more limited curricula taught at less challenging levels, more serious health problems, much more turnover of enrollment, and many other factors that seriously affect academic achievement.

### **Theorizing Resegregation: Schooling and Quarantined Disadvantage**

The research on racial-ethnic and class divisions in post-*Brown* era schooling presents a strong case that the goals of desegregation were never accomplished. But the

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<sup>5</sup> That is, the Black-white index of dissimilarity in Los Angeles County according to Census 2000 was 70.9%; the Hispanic-white index was 64.4%.

concept of “resegregation” implies that there was a moment of desegregation, after which the schools reverted to their previously segregated state – an implication that contradicts the historical record. In addition, the word “resegregation” hearkens to a time of explicit, codified Black-white segregation under Jim Crow, and thus appears inadequate to address the complex intertwining of race-ethnicity, class, and school quality that has characterized schooling in the U.S. over time and across regions. How might scholars better conceptualize the current state of unequal schools in the U.S. and their political significance?

The specific history of segregation in Los Angeles public schools elides simple distinctions between *de facto* and *de jure* segregation. Though the California state constitution has disallowed the segregation of African American and Latino students from their white peers since the late 1800s, unconstitutional-yet-official school segregation policies were common until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. When these policies were successfully struck down in 1948, a second, more pernicious form of legal segregation was overlooked – residential segregation maintained through restrictive covenants. After the abolition of restrictive covenants, white homeowners fought to maintain and expand their privileged status and access to high property values within the space of Los Angeles County and through outward expansion into the greater Los Angeles area. This fight sometimes took illegal forms (cross burnings, bombings of homes, direct violence against African Americans) and involved extra-legal discrimination by real estate agents, home developers, and industrial employers; often, however, state institutions were directly involved in enforcing segregation through FHA “redlining,” zoning restrictions in neighborhoods, and decisions regarding tax collection and distribution (Davis 1992; Fischer, Hout et al. 1996). These policies were integral to maintaining segregated neighborhoods and to ensuring that African American communities would bear the brunt of an economic downturn at the same time that white communities reaped financial rewards from inflated land values. Together with Proposition 13, which restricted the funds for education that could be raised through property taxes, these historical trends created the separate and highly unequal conditions that currently characterize California public schools.

Citing similar evidence from throughout the nation, scholars in critical race theory have long questioned supposedly clear distinctions between *de facto* and *de jure* segregation and between desegregation and resegregation. According to Derrick Bell, the supposed resegregation of schools does not describe “second-generation” segregation problems but rather a change in the methods used to ensure that when educational resources are distributed, “whites get what they need, and blacks get whatever is left” (Bell 1983). Likewise, Cheryl Harris (1993:1757) argued that by restricting desegregation policies to “neighborhood schools” without problematizing definitions of neighborhood that benefit whites or examining the material inequalities produced by institutional racism, in decisions following *Brown* the Supreme Court upheld the “white privilege and Black subordination fostered by systems of interlocking private and public power.”

To foreground my discussion of teachers’ work in schools whose racial-ethnic and class dynamics were influenced by histories of white flight, I draw upon these critical historical analyses to argue that white flight is not a discrete event; it is better understood as an ongoing process through which white families and communities maintain their

privileged access to resources. Instead of viewing current school demographics as a legacy of the past, I argue that racial and economic inequalities are maintained across geographic and social space through “a powerful and complicated nexus among the forces of economic restructuring, residential segregation, group relations, population change, and patterns of community and individual adaptation” (Bobo, Oliver et al. 2000:30). The history of California’s schools has involved class-privileged whites consistently using *space* to consolidate institutional resources that might otherwise be shared across the state’s racial-ethnically and class diverse population.

In analyzing the relationship between space and the maintenance of white privilege, Laura Pulido (2000:13) asserted that racism is intrinsically a “dynamic sociospatial process” that is “both constitutive of the city and produced by it.” Moving the focus of scholars of environmental racism from discrete acts of intentional racism *against* African Americans and Latinos, Pulido changes the narrative of racism by asking how white privilege (in the case of her paper, specifically the privilege to live free of industrial pollutants) is maintained through the racial and economic composition of city space. That is, she asks “how did whites distance themselves from both industrial pollution and nonwhites?” (*ibid.*). A similar question can be asked of schools. Instead of distinguishing various forms of segregation as *de facto* or *de jure* or as intentional segregation vs. neighborhood schooling, one can ask: How do whites distance their children from both educational disadvantage and students of color?

To address this question, an understanding of racism and white privilege is essential. White privilege does not necessarily refer to explicit ideologies of racial superiority or to overt acts of hostility but to the “hegemonic structures, practices, and ideologies that reproduce whites’ privileged status” (Pulido 2000:15) and that are “simultaneously historical and spatial,” and “come at the expense of nonwhites” (Pulido 2000:16). White privilege is maintained through the production of spaces with a high proportion of white people, the policing of the boundaries of these spaces, and, I would add, the ongoing development and preservation of economic capital within these spaces (e.g., through property values and the local control of tax receipts). The hegemonic structures, practices and ideologies that produce and reproduce white privilege are maintained within “racialized social systems” or “societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races” (Bonilla-Silva 1997:429).

According to Pulido (2000:30) neighborhoods are “not merely groupings of individuals, homes, and commerce, they are *constellations of opportunities* with powerful consequences for both the recipient and non-recipient populations.” Schools are a primary mechanism through which communities can maintain and control opportunities across generations. Thus, white privilege is maintained by keeping many white students (especially those advantaged by family income, wealth, and neighborhood) as isolated as possible from the educational disadvantages associated with both poverty and the material, social, and psychological consequences of structural racism. Although K-12 public schooling is universal, white students so isolated gain immense advantages in the evaluation and sorting system that leads to higher education.

There are long-standing debates in the scholarly literature and in popular media as to whether white flight is based in white desires for racial separation or is a white response to declines in “school quality” (Wegman 1994; Andrews 2002). The rapidity of

white flight – occurring before any changes in school performance have time to develop – is often used as a counterargument to the latter point. In light of Pulido’s (2000) analysis of the sociospatial processes that maintain white privilege, however, it would be a mistake to counterpose these two motivations – racial and educational. As Jack Schneider (2008) pointed out in his study of white flight from LAUSD, by withdrawing wealthier white students and thus helping to create schools with high concentrations of low-income students of color, white parents in Los Angeles *produced* the low-quality schools that they feared. His argument aligns with Douglas Massey’s (1990) finding that the production of segregated neighborhoods “focuses and exacerbates any change in the economic status of minority groups” and brings about a “geographic concentration of poverty” (Massey 1990:337). The effects of exogenous economic shocks are highly concentrated in segregated minority communities, along with the deterioration of neighborhood networks, resources, and local tax receipts. Thus, neighborhood segregation concentrates poverty in minority neighborhoods, which in turn “inevitably concentrates deprivation in schools” (Massey 1990:350).

White flight – and the subsequent maintenance of residential and school segregation – produces, concentrates, and exacerbates educational disadvantage in high-minority schools while simultaneously quarantining that disadvantage, shielding white children from its effects. In public schools, educational resources are shared among students with multiple needs,<sup>6</sup> including the linguistic needs of immigrant students (Orfield and Lee 2006), the mentorship needs of students in socially isolated communities (Wilson 1987; Ainsworth 2002), and the psychological needs of students who have endured community and domestic violence (Harris, Chamberlain et al. 2012). Each of these needs, when not properly resourced and addressed, can be understood as a form of educational disadvantage that is not isolated to a single student but that has an effect on all students within a school. By creating and maintaining neighborhoods where not only poverty but also unemployment, crime, and high rates of incarceration are concentrated, and by isolating the children of these neighborhoods in segregated schools, many whites are able to quarantine educational disadvantage and avoid taking on their share of the educational burden.

These patterns shape the contexts of teachers’ work in Bunker, Unity, and Prestige High Schools. These schools were each produced to quarantine the educational disadvantages found in the low-income communities of color surrounding Bunker and Unity High so that students at schools like Prestige could enjoy resources that are focused only on their particular, less diverse, educational needs. The teachers I interviewed were aware not only of the racial segregation across schools, but also of the particular class and neighborhood-based advantages and disadvantages that students faced in terms of educational, linguistic, safety, and emotional needs. How they negotiated this awareness to see teaching as good, important work and how the particular needs of their student

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<sup>6</sup> Educational researchers have long advocated a needs-based approach to predictors of educational outcomes, rather than a strict class or race-based approach. For example, in a report based on the National Household Educational Survey, the authors assert that most racial differences in emerging literacy among Kindergartners can be explained by a combination of factors such as mother’s education, poverty, language-minority status, and family structure. See Zill, N. et al (1995).

populations affected the emotional contours of their work is the subject of this dissertation. Before engaging the empirical data from my interviews, however, I will first present the objective material, and social conditions that teachers confronted as they worked to address their students' needs.

### **Quarantined Disadvantage at Bunker, Unity, and Prestige High Schools**

Teachers at the three schools I studied faced remarkably different social conditions for their care work based on their school's position within a system of quarantined disadvantage. Teachers encountered different *needs* in their students based on the available material, academic, relational, and psychological resources in these children's families and neighborhoods. They also encountered different types of *resources* to meet these needs, depending on the school's history and organizational structure. In this section, I will present objective data drawn from various school and community reports to describe student needs and school resources, as well as provide information about school performance on standard academic measures and about my sample of teachers.

The students at the three schools I studied come from remarkably different neighborhood contexts. Prestige High School was located in the small city of Juniper (Population 23,000), which incorporated as a wealthy white enclave in the 1970s. At the time of my interviews, Juniper<sup>7</sup> had a median household income of \$150,000 per year – or 2.6 times the median household income for the state of California. Nearly 43% of households earned over \$125,000 per year, while fewer than 8% of households brought home less than \$20,000 per year. The mean home price in Juniper was \$1.3 million, as compared to \$280,000 in the state as a whole. Of residents aged over 25, approximately 64% held a bachelor's degree or higher. Foreign-born residents accounted for 19.5% of the population, with South Korea and Iran as the most common sending countries. Only 7% of Juniper families were headed by single parents. Juniper experienced very little violent crime, with only one homicide in the period from January 2007-December 2011.

In stark contrast to Prestige, Bunker High School was located in the low-income city of Silverwood (Population 97,000), which transitioned from an all-white community to a nearly all-African American community in the 1960s, and later accommodated a growing population of immigrants. In 2010, the median household income of Silverwood was \$43,000 with 29.6% of households earning less than \$20,000 per year. Only 6% of Silverwood residents aged 25 or over held a bachelor's degree or higher. About 22% of families in Silverwood were headed by single parents. Foreign born residents accounted for 13% of the population, with Mexico and El Salvador as the most common countries of birth. Silverwood was marked by gang violence, with 156 homicides in the city between January 2007 and December 2011.

Unity High School was located in the racially and socioeconomically diverse city of Amapola (Population 138,000). Thus, although isolated within their school, low-income, racial-ethnic minority students at Unity likely had greater access to resources in the city of Amapola than Bunker students did in the city of Silverwood. As a whole,

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<sup>7</sup> Data on the cities are drawn from the "Mapping LA" feature of the Los Angeles Times website: <http://projects.latimes.com/mapping-la/neighborhoods/>. These data were accessed in October of 2012. Pseudonyms for the cities are maintained throughout this dissertation.

Amapola had a median household income of \$62,825; 12.5% of households earned over \$125,000 and 20.7% of households earned less than \$20,000. In terms of education, 41.5% of residents over 25 had a bachelor's or higher and 32.3% of residents were foreign born, with Mexico and the Philippines the most common foreign places of birth. Approximately 13.5% of Amapola families were headed by a single parent. Within the city boundaries, 51 public and charter K-12 schools served approximately 32,000 students and 53 private K-12 schools served approximately 11,500 students. Amapola parents also sent their children to private schools outside of city boundaries. Certain Amapola neighborhoods dealt with gang violence, though far less than in Silverwood – between 2007 and 2011 the number of homicides in Amapola was 26.

In terms of racial-ethnic makeup (Table 2.1), the schools of Unity and Bunker High presented remarkably similar student populations. Both schools had a Latino majority (66% at Unity and 78.3% at Bunker) and a large African American minority (28.9% at Unity and 18.3% at Bunker). In contrast, Prestige High's student population was majority white (58.6%) with a large Asian American minority (25.8%).

**Table 2.1. Student racial-ethnic composition<sup>8</sup>**

	Bunker HS	Unity HS	Prestige HS
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0.1%
Asian	0	0.4%	25.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.7%	0.2%	0
Filipino	0.1%	0.9%	0.3%
Hispanic or Latino	78.3%	66%	9.2%
Black or African American	18.3%	28.9%	0.4%
White	0.3%	2.4%	58.6%
Two or More Races	0.1%	1.2%	4.5%
None Reported	1.2%	0.1%	1.0%

Because I chose to study schools with conditions of quarantined disadvantage, the racial-ethnic composition of each was linked to sources of educational disadvantages, including poverty measured by participation in the national free reduced lunch program; linguistic needs measured by the number of English Language Learners; and students with disabilities. As Table 2.2 shows, Bunker High had the highest level of need in terms of English Language Development, and Unity High had the highest levels of students identified as disabled. This may be partially due to the school's relatively large population (16%)<sup>9</sup> of students living in foster care and in group homes, some of whom may have been diagnosed as Seriously Emotionally Disturbed.

<sup>8</sup> All quantitative data provided in this section have been drawn from the School Accountability Report Cards for the 2010-2011 school year for each high school and from the Ed-Data website where data were missing from a SARC. <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Pages/Home.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> This number is a direct calculation from a counselor at Unity High School.

**Table 2.2. Student Educational Disadvantage**

	Bunker HS	Prestige HS	Unity HS
Free/Reduced Lunch	73.6%	1.1%	78.3%
English Language Learners	35.6% <sup>10</sup>	5.2%	16.7%
Students with Disabilities	6.0% <sup>11</sup>	6.7%	15.7%

The next table (Table 2.3) provides quantitative measures of school resources. In terms of class size, all three schools were quite similar, and Unity High School, which was also the smallest school, had the smallest class size. Bunker High had the least technological resources available at the school, with 20 students per computer on campus; Unity high had the most computers per student, probably because the school's participation in the "Career Pathways Academy" school model required computers for students' career courses, in which 100% of students were enrolled. Prestige had by far the lowest student to counselor ratio of all three schools; the other two schools both had student-to-counselor ratios well over 400:1. Regarding the school facility (not included in the table), each of 8 aspects of facility conditions were ranked "good" at Prestige; 2 of these received only a "fair" ranking at Unity; and 4 aspects of facility conditions were ranked as "poor" at Bunker, with the report noting problems such as HVAC leaks, standing water, uneven pavement, broken glass, and exposed active electrical wiring. Concerning school financial resources, Bunker High School spent far less per student than the other two schools. According to teachers I interviewed, Unity High received supplementary funding from the state due to its early adoption of the California Partnership Academy model and Prestige High School received supplementary funding from a local educational foundation.

**Table 2.3. School Resources**

	Bunker HS	Prestige HS	Unity HS
Class Size	28.7	29.2	26.1
Students per Computer	20	6	2.4
Number of Counselors (FTE)	5 (480:1)	5 (290:1)	2.5 (440:1)
Expenditures per student	\$4,831	\$8,187	\$7,688
Total 9-12 Enrollment	2400	1451	1100

In addition to these quantitative measures of school resources, qualitative data provided in each self report to the accrediting body Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) provide evidence of the differences in the types of support programs each school offered to meet their students' needs. These reports are written by a team of

<sup>10</sup> Certified data were not available for 2010-2011; this number is reported for the year 2009-2010 from the Ed-Data website.

<sup>11</sup> Bunker's SARC reports did not publish these numbers; instead, this number is drawn from the school's self-report to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.



school officials, teachers, and parents. Unity High School's supports were oriented around school-community interaction. The school hired a full-time Community Liaison who managed a campus parent center located at the entrance to the school, and a number of local non-profits provided student services on campus, including three youth development organizations, a college preparatory non-profit, a non-profit providing medical, dental, and mental health services to low-income youth, and a youth and family services provider. The school offered a number of academic enrichment programs including AVID<sup>12</sup> and Puente,<sup>13</sup> both of which enrolled a large proportion of the student body. The school also had a Career Center on campus that organized visits with college representatives, offered a community college course on campus after school to adults and school youth, and boasted of a large urban garden on the school site. Interestingly, the opening paragraphs of the WASC report for Unity High focused neither on these resources nor on student need, but on famous graduates throughout the history of the school (first paragraph) and historical transitions in the racial-ethnic makeup of the student population (second paragraph). This linking of student demographics with a history of school pride was significant for the faculty culture of Unity High School described in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

In its WASC report, Prestige High School largely focused on the school's strong academic performance. The school was proud that 76% of its graduates matriculated at four-year colleges, and another 23% matriculated at two-year colleges. The school's focal point for continued improvement (which was raised by many teachers as well) was the "middle student" who does not qualify for special education services but is not a high academic performer. To support these students, the school instituted a program to provide targeted students with enrichment and academic help during one period of the day. In contrast to the wide array of community organizations and non-profits involved in Unity High School, the main source of external support cited by Prestige was parent and community organizations including a sports booster club, the PTA, Music Parents, Friends of the Arts, and a Campus Pride organization to which parents donated time and money to maintain the school facility. The WASC report also bragged that the local school foundation, which was largely supported by parents, donated over a million dollars to the district each year.

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<sup>12</sup> "AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, is a college readiness system for elementary through higher education that is designed to increase schoolwide learning and performance... Although AVID serves all students, it focuses on the least served students in the academic middle. The formula is simple - raise expectations of students and, with the AVID support system in place, they will rise to the challenge."

[http://www.avid.org/abo\\_whatisavid.html](http://www.avid.org/abo_whatisavid.html)

<sup>13</sup> "The mission of the Puente Project is to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students who enroll in 4-year colleges and universities, earn degrees, and return to the community as leaders and mentors for future generations... Puente students take an accelerated 9th and 10th grade sequence of college preparatory English with the same Puente-trained teacher, who integrates Mexican-American/Latino and other multicultural literature into the district's mandated core curriculum."

<http://www.puente.net>

Rather than focus on resources, the WASC report of Bunker High School opens with a focus on student needs that explain the school's poor performance on measures of academic achievement. For example, the report states that:

Homelessness, group and/or foster home placement, unemployment and/or underemployment, itinerant, and undocumented residency status contribute to the daily survival barriers our students must confront. These economic realities are compounded by the physical and safety issues of the [Silverwood] community. While many [Bunker] HS students reside in apartments, condominiums, and rental homes surrounding our campus, many others commute via car or public transportation from distances several miles away often crossing multiple "gang boundaries."

The report also noted that because the school's "Hispanic" population had shifted from predominantly Mexican American to include immigrant students from Central America as well, "multicultural pluralism within the Hispanic subgroup presents a cadre of unique academic and psychosocial needs for our students."

Though the remainder of the report focused on goals set by Bunker High School to improve the school's ability to support students in three key areas (academic achievement, student support services, and school climate/culture), it was clear that the school offered few resources to support the diverse array of needs outlined at the beginning of the report. The school offered enrichment programs such as AVID, MESA,<sup>14</sup> and competitive debate, but only a small handful of students participated in these programs. No local non-profit intervention on campus was listed in the report, and interviews with counselors at the school confirmed that this was the case. The WASC report listed three student support organizations, and these were divided by race and gender – one targeted African American boys, one targeted all African American students, and one targeted Hispanic students. The report explicitly states that the school had insufficient funding for training or supplies, a high number of students requiring academic intervention, and "limited site-based psychosocial services & resources available to address students' presenting issues."

Some standard methods of school performance (see Table 2.4) reflected the differences between the schools reported above, in terms of both student needs and the resources that were available to meet them. For example, Prestige HS had the highest graduation rates and lowest dropout rates of all three schools, followed by Unity and then Bunker. Prestige also far outperformed the other two schools in terms of both the high school exit exam (CAHSEE) and Advanced Placement<sup>15</sup> (AP) exams. Unity HS had a much lower AP pass rate (measured as a score of 3, 4, or 5) than the other two schools. In terms of the transition to post-secondary education, the most important measure of school performance was the proportion of graduates with grades of C or higher in all courses required to prepare for enrollment in California public universities (also called UCs and

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<sup>14</sup> "One of the country's most innovative and successful programs, MESA works with thousands of educationally disadvantaged students so they excel in math and science and graduate with math-based degrees." <http://mesa.ucop.edu/>

<sup>15</sup> AP courses are linked to an end-of-year comprehensive exam in a given subject area offered by the College Board. Some colleges accept a passing score on these exams as fulfilling course credits. <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html>

CSUs). Over 80% of Prestige students graduated UC/CSU eligible as compared to 50.6% at Unity and a dismal 13.7% at Bunker.

**Table 2.4. School Performance Measures**

	Bunker HS	Prestige HS	Unity HS
Cohort Graduation Rate	63.1%	98.7%	76.3%
Cohort Dropout Rate	25.9%	0.3%	15.5%
CAHSEE 10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Proficiency	35% (ELA) <sup>16</sup> 27% (Math)	94% (ELA) 93% (Math)	45% (ELA) 40% (Math)
AP Exam Takers	219	490	153
AP Pass Rate	26.5%	85.5%	8.7%
UC/CSU Eligible Graduates	13.7%	80.4%	50.6%

## Conclusion

The term “quarantined disadvantage” captures the dynamics of inequality between Unity, Bunker, and Prestige High Schools. These dynamics are rooted in the racial-ethnic makeup of each school but also extend far beyond simple demographics to include inequalities of poverty, language, family structure, homelessness, safety, and many other sources of educational disadvantage. These dynamics are maintained by institutional and cultural systems of racial-ethnic and class advantage and serve to reproduce white privilege across space, but they also defy notions of segregation as the absolute Black-white separation of Jim Crow. Though all three schools’ demographics shifted to accommodate rapidly growing immigrant populations beginning in the 1980s, they did so in ways that maintained the unequal distribution of educational disadvantage, with low-income Latino students attending Bunker and Unity and high-income Asian American and Middle Eastern students attending Prestige. Even within the Asian American ethnic group across all three schools, differences of class and the educational background of migrant families are apparent; whereas the majority of Asian American students at Prestige were ethnically Korean or Chinese, most Asian American students at Bunker and Unity were Filipino or Pacific Islander. This demonstrates that while the racial-ethnic composition of these schools was quite dynamic, the system of quarantined disadvantage that benefited wealthy white students remained firmly entrenched.

Because of these conditions of quarantined disadvantage, teachers at the three schools I studied faced remarkably different conditions for the cultivation of caring relationships with students that constituted one of the primary psychic rewards of teaching (Lortie 1975). Teachers at Bunker and Unity had more opportunities to care for their students because they encountered broad and deep student needs in their daily work. However, the differences in *resources* across these two schools, which were related to their location in particular communities and to the unique history of each school, provided teachers with very different capabilities to meet these needs. While teachers at Prestige had incredible resources to draw upon in terms of parent wealth, those resources largely limited the type of caring teachers could offer to addressing only academic needs. These differences in teachers caring based on each school’s particular position within a

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<sup>16</sup> English Language Arts.

system of quarantined disadvantage – and the consequences of these differences for the reproduction of that system – will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

The resources available at each school for teachers to care for their students are best illustrated by the structure located at the physical center of each campus. Reflecting both lack of material and social supports and a fearful, hunkered-down approach to student need, separating the central quad from the football field at Bunker High School was a long trailer called the “Processing Center.”<sup>17</sup> Inside the processing center was a large fold-out table where campus security guards sat, as well as two cubicles – one for Silverwood Police and another for a probation officer. At Unity High, the central building, located right in the middle of the quad, was the “Counseling Center,” which contained an office for a probation officer but also offices for the community support agencies that were involved on campus as well as a student computer lab and the school’s Career Center. Finally, at Prestige High School, at the base of the main school building was a state-of-the art library called the “Information Resource Center.” The library had a mezzanine with book stacks, attractive round tables for studying, a computer lab and full-length windows and was staffed by a full-time media resource librarian funded by the local educational foundation. These “Centers” stood as a firm physical representation of how the school perceived student need and how they resourced those needs at each school under a system of quarantined disadvantage.

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<sup>17</sup> These names are not pseudonyms.

### Chapter 3

#### The Workspaces of Bunker, Prestige, and Unity High Schools

In the previous chapter, I took a “just the facts, ma’am” approach to describing the contexts surrounding teachers’ work at Unity, Bunker, and Prestige High School, presenting the local history and statistical information on the demographics and resources of each school. In this chapter, I move away from the *objective* conditions of quarantined disadvantage across the three schools to describe teachers’ *subjective* experiences of their particular school contexts. That is, I describe the three schools as the teachers I interviewed perceived them. I do not presume to describe schools as they *were*, as if there is one true portrait, or as they might be viewed by parents or students. Instead, I describe teachers’ shared conceptions of each school as a site for their care work as a facet of what, more generically, is called the daily work of “teaching.” I do so with an interest in the specific culture that sustained and defined relationships among faculty but also with an attention to teachers’ shared views of the material, organizational, demographic, and historical conditions of the school in which they worked.

In order to describe the schools as they were experienced by teachers, I draw on Michel de Certeau’s (1984) concept of *space* as distinct from *place*. Certeau defined “place” as the physical dimensions of a given location; in contrast, “space” is “practiced place,” constituted through use by social actors. This understanding of space was also used by Heidi Barajas and Amy Ronnkvist (2007:1521) who defined school space as “not only physical space but also the meanings and ideologies that mediate the relationship between social structures and agents.” The interaction between physical place and subjective meaning as it is lived in space has been acknowledged in the case of students, who may interpret poor school facilities as evidence that “nobody cares” (Fine, Burns et al. 2004).

Teachers whom I interviewed across Unity, Bunker and Prestige High Schools reiterated this point, noting that schools are living spaces that present unique psychosocial contexts for students’ development. For example, Hazel Tarver, a Unity High Special Education teacher described the differences between teaching at Unity and her previous teaching experiences in terms of physical representations of school culture. She discussed the level of trash on each campus and how quickly it was picked up, how many motivational posters were in the hallways and what messages they conveyed, where flowers were planted around the campus, and whether the schools were surrounded by fences. She told me

If you put bars up... it’s more like a prison, and the kids who are there, they are going to act like they are in a prison. They are going to act like animals... It’s a lot about how you treat people, to get that feeling of ‘I’m worthy of something more.’

Hazel’s point that the organization of space within a school sends a message to students about their worth was also made by another Unity High School teacher. Graphic design teacher Whitney Hanlon argued that one of the most important changes her school could make would be to fix the cracks in the asphalt that paved the quad because “the cracks become this kind of analogy for – it’s like going to an interview and wearing your jeans.” That is, Whitney felt that cracks in the pavement conveyed to students that the adults in power did not take the school as seriously as they should. Along these same

lines, Bunker math teacher Jason Trice wished that his school would add lockers to the campus to help ensure that students would bring books to class. He felt that lockers would help the school “tremendously” for another reason as well:

Because kids have a little pride when they have a little space that's theirs.

They can decorate it – this is mine. It also demands responsibility because you have to keep up your locker, you have to memorize your code. I think that's lost, that sense of identity is lost with this generation.

Teachers like Jason Trice, Whitney Hanlon, and Hazel Tarver translated the physical conditions of school place into the psychosocial conditions of school space as they discussed the lived experience of being a student at their school. Other teachers also acknowledged a similar experience of place and space for the school-as-workplace. Disheartened and overwhelmed by her work at Bunker High School, English Teacher Charis Doran described the physical school in the following manner:

There's just this air of – it's almost depressing. Its like, you walk onto the campus and you feel this tension – the kids feel it, teachers feel it. It looks like a prison. Its ugly, there's garbage everywhere, tagging all over the walls. It's like there's no intrinsic motivation within the school itself to take pride in their surroundings and make it a real school.

Other teachers also described their psychosocial experience of school as a *workspace* by sketching a picture of school as physical-place. As an outside observer, it seemed to me that the main buildings of all three schools were clean and well lit. However, George Reedy, a Prestige teacher with experience of Unity High School through his prior job with a non-profit serving emotionally disturbed youth in Amapola, did not share my perception. Comparing the aesthetic value of Unity's stately turn-of-the-century school building with the 1960s practical, concrete structure of Prestige, a nearby, newer school, he stated:

From the outside looking in, Unity and several others of the Amapola schools are really beautiful schools. I mean, you always see them filming movies and everything on the outside of the school. Inside of the schools, they're dark. They feel alien. And so I think the physical plants are – even though Prestige is ugly from the outside looking in, inside looking out, it's not so bad. At least we have light, we have power. So the physical plant is remarkably different.

In this chapter, I draw upon teachers' narratives to provide a visceral sense of how teachers experienced the *space* of their schools. The three high schools I studied are physical places that exist in time; one's subjective understanding of these places depends on the viewer, and these places involve shifting configurations of people and power. However, the pseudonyms I gave to the schools – Bunker HS, Prestige HS, and Unity HS – capture the collective experience of how these schools functioned as a space of work and a space of care for the 20 teachers I talked to at each school at the time of my research. Their descriptions foreground teachers' individual accounts of their emotional relationships as they are presented in this dissertation.

### **Bunker High School**

In their narratives about Bunker High School, teachers described a trajectory of long-term organizational decline. They commented that the school had once been a first-class institution that produced successful students and bragged of a beautiful physical

plant with an Olympic-sized stadium and swimming pool. After white flight from the city of Bunker in the 1950s, material resources decreased, but the school remained academically strong until the 1980s, when teachers reported a decline in the quality of students that they related to poverty, family structure, and the introduction of crack cocaine. Currently, teachers commented that Bunker students entered the 9th grade academically ill prepared and distracted by family and community struggles; however, many also said that students were the schools' greatest strength due to their desire to overcome obstacles and because of their enjoyable personalities. The greatest challenges teachers said they faced were a dysfunctional administrative structure and poor accountability among school staff at all levels.

Although teachers described Bunker as having numerous problems, many of the teachers I interviewed expressed a strong dedication to their students. Bunker teachers generally viewed their students as strong people who attended school despite enduring deep personal trauma in their families and in their community. Bunker teachers were often deeply involved in individual students' personal lives and worked to create academic opportunities for students who sometimes entered high school with only very basic elementary-level skills. My interviewees generally described other Bunker teachers as extremely hard-working and caring. Though they could also cite examples of teachers who openly bad-mouthed students or took personal phone calls during class time, Bunker teachers generally felt that the faculty consisted of compassionate people who were genuinely devoted to their students. Unfortunately, a fragmented school culture limited their ability to turn this shared devotion into a common mission through which they might unite to improve the school as an organization.

Bunker High School was under the leadership of an imposing African American man in his 70s who was also a graduate of the school. Though Bunker had experienced high principal turnover, Mr. Grey had been at the school for six years, which earned him sometimes begrudging respect from teachers. Before he took over the helm, teachers reported that the school had experienced problems with extreme violence resulting from gang activity. Teachers reported that police busses were brought in daily to remove large numbers of students to juvenile court. Teachers credited the principal's willingness to make himself visible as an authority figure on campus and to quickly remove violent students to the city's alternative high school with ending large-scale gang violence on campus. However, teachers also complained that Mr. Grey overemphasized athletics and ignored academics at the school, that he did not know teachers' names, that he took an overtly religious tone in school meetings (some teachers appreciated this while it made others uncomfortable), and that he surrounded himself with an incompetent staff. Indeed, the teachers offered numerous descriptions of the daily failures of school staff who cheated the students and made teachers' jobs difficult, such as frequent unplanned assemblies and insufficient substitutes called in to teach (so students with absent teachers were sent en masse to the auditorium).

Bunker teachers also complained about problems gaining access to resources. Though teachers suspected that access to special funds including Title I funding, SIDAIE (English language development) and Williams settlement<sup>18</sup> funding should provide the

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<sup>18</sup> The case of *Eliezer Williams et al. v. the State of California et al.* was settled in 2004, mandating additional funds for standards-aligned instructional materials and for critical

school with ample resources, these resources rarely reached their classrooms. They largely attributed this lack of available resources to administrative disorganization. For example, some teachers reported that department heads would get word of available funds with only hours left until the ordering deadline. Along these same lines, many teachers reported that the school clerk responsible for the supply room acted as a petty tyrant preventing teachers from acquiring needed supplies ranging from paper and chalk to an expensive document camera ordered through a grant. English Teacher Brittany Reed even recounted that the clerk once locked her in the supply room after she rejected his repeated sexual advances. Describing the lack of materials in her classroom, another English teacher, Charis Doran, said:

It never seemed like we could get enough books or get a classroom set of dictionaries, or any time you would need to go to the clerk who handles all the day-to-day supplies, it was like a fight. To get like, well, I need a cartridge for my printer in my classroom. ‘What do you need it for?’ Or I need a roll of tape. ‘Why? I just gave you one last month.’ It was like it was coming out of his own pocket. So it was definitely a constant struggle.

Teachers were not passive in the face of these problems. Brittany Reed, the teacher who was sexually harassed, filed two grievances with the district, and another teacher reported filing four grievances before complaining to the ACLU about the lack of supplies. A third teacher called the state office of education when, in her first year of teaching, she was assigned 36-48 students in each class period. However, as the difficulties persisted, teachers reported feeling that they had no real way to reform the school’s chaotic administrative structure.

These problems extended beyond Bunker High to the surrounding community. English teacher and long-time department chair Victoria Scott reported that she had her students read *Atlas Shrugged* every year because the Ayn Rand Foundation provided free copies. For many of her students, this was the first book they owned. She complained that the city had no bookstore, though a nearby big box store recently added a book section. In addition, the community library had been closed for three years for renovations, only to reopen with hours that ended in the early evening. She said “[there are] so many ways that the community itself is either anti- or non-education, but then they cry ‘Oh my god! Our test scores.’ What the hell did you think?”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the lack of access to resources at Bunker, the use of technology to support instruction was limited. One teacher reported borrowing a projector from a colleague to use Powerpoint in her classroom. Others told me that computers were outdated or broken. Resources such as DVD players and televisions or laptop carts for student use were shared by buildings or departments, so teachers reported that others would “hoard” these supplies and they could not be accessed. Indeed, hoarding appeared to be a common strategy among teachers at Bunker, and not only for expensive technological resources. When they were able to gain access to materials, many teachers hoarded items as an individual strategy to ensure classroom supplies. For example, English teacher Monica Baker reported keeping the overhead projector she used

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repairs to schools with scores in the bottom three deciles of the Academic Performance Index



in the trunk of her car to prevent it from being stolen if left in her room or “lost” in the supply room. Spanish teacher Celia Whitten stated, “We have to fight tooth and nail for [materials]. Like, just reams of paper. It sounds crazy, but we have to hide it once we get it so nobody will ask you to borrow any.”

While in another context, teachers hiding supplies from each other may indeed sound “crazy,” at Bunker, it was signalled a school culture marked by extreme fragmentation among teachers. Celia Whitten added:

Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of things. And I'm not talking about material things. Well, that too. But we're not very collegial. I mean, I am in my department with my other teachers, which I love, but as a whole, we're really not. And I think there's a really big separation between administrators and teachers. So basically, your only thing is your kids.

A few departments were indeed able to cultivate collegial relationships, as were the 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, who were physically separated from the rest of the campus and managed by a respected administrator. In general, however, the lack of time set aside for teacher collaboration and the disorganized and dysfunctional administrative structure made it difficult for teachers to learn to trust one another, or to develop friendly relations. Some departments were divided into factions depending on relationships to the department chair while in others, teachers spent little time interacting with colleagues in any way. It was possible for teachers to “go months without seeing someone who is in my same grade level, same department but his room is across campus.” For many teachers, “We [colleagues] don't interact, we don't get along. I've never seen such low morale in my life.”

Beyond simple disorganization, teachers also perceived some staff as posing a threat to their students. A number of teachers cited hardworking and dedicated counselors and administrators, but they could also name administrative staff they considered lazy or who did not “think girls should go to college.” Additionally, many teachers reported that security guards bullied and sexually harassed students:

The kids have told me and I've seen with my own eyes them roughing up some of the kids. Especially like the really mild-mannered Latino kids. They will bully them. It's really disheartening to see. Some of them sexually harass the girls and say like ‘you're looking good in those shorts,’ you know, really inappropriate crazy things like that (Monica Baker, English teacher).

Teachers also reported that security guards smoked cigars or marijuana on campus, that they cursed at students, and that they took advantage of their position financially by selling snack foods to students. Along similar lines, Celia Whitten, who was advisor of the school's Green Club, reported that when students started a recycling program, the custodians, who supplemented their incomes by culling bottles and cans from the garbage, harassed and intimidated the kids, saying “you're cutting into our weekend fund.”

Relationships among teachers and between teachers and staff were not always so divided. According to Jason Trice, a math teacher with 16 years of experience at the school:

When I first started, it was great. It was real camaraderie. [We used to go on retreats together]. I was always the young guy – that's the baby, and

they took care of the baby. It was a family... It's more fractured now. It used to be real strong, a lot of networks, just real tight, but they all fractured.

To explain this fracturing, Bunker teachers referred to corruption and mismanagement at the district level, which “trickle[d] down to the school.” Teachers complained of embezzlement and phony contracts and of uneducated school board members with no experience of the schools they governed. They reported that cronyism and nepotism determined district hiring. Thus, the school's professional development programs were run by a woman whose purported sole qualification was her sexual relationship with the principal; and the testing coordinators, who teachers complained did not begin state exams on time or inform students and teachers of where they needed to be, had connections to the “old boys club, the old girls club.” For teachers without access to district interpersonal networks, “if one isn't part of that insular group, then one is basically on the outside looking in.”

While teachers were troubled by the effects of school disorganization on their own working conditions, they were outraged by the negative effects it had on students. In addition to the harassment of students by administrators, counselors, security guards and custodians described above, teachers reported a variety of other social and academic problems the school created for its students. For example, the school had a policy that effectively prevented many students from doing homework or studying at home by requiring them to pay to replace any books lost in previous years. Teachers also reported that instead of hiring multiple substitute teachers, one would be hired to cover multiple classes, and the students merely sat in the auditorium when their teacher was absent, wasting instructional hours. In addition, for many years, the school had no 9<sup>th</sup> grade science classes. When Bunker decided to implement a 9<sup>th</sup> grade science program, administrators began the classes with substitutes before requesting teacher hires, so one class of students effectively lost nearly a year of instruction and began high school with a negative experience of science courses.

In addition to these academic problems, the school created social difficulties as well. As an organization, Bunker presented itself as hostile towards students who identified as queer or queer allies. When a large group of students and three advisors attempted to form a Gay-Straight Alliance on campus, the principal signed the group's charter without reading it. When he realized that he had authorized the club, he stormed into the student meeting, yelled at the advisor, and threatened to revoke the charter. He could not legally do so, but the club continued to operate while facing hostility from some teachers who ripped down posters or refused to respect students' choice to participate in a Day of Silence. Beyond this suppression of a specific group of students, teachers complained that the disorganization of Bunker High School made it difficult for students to identify proudly with their school, even though the school performed well in athletic events. English teacher Charis Doran told me “the kids joke that they don't feel like they go to a ‘real’ high school,” and Spanish teacher Celia Whitten attributed this problem directly to school disorganization:

I think if we were more united as a school, the kids would see that and they would reflect that. We have no – there's no spirit, there's no school spirit. There is no sense of ownership at all, and I think that's a big block for the kids.

The problems confronting students at Bunker High School compounded the obstacles they faced outside of school. Academically, teachers reported that students entered high school lacking sufficient preparation, testing well below grade level in reading and math. Students had little exposure to science education in junior high (because periods allotted to science were used for test preparation) or to cultural events, local recreational opportunities, and reading at home. Celia Whitten, advisor of the environmental club, told me that the beach clean-up day was the first time many of her students had seen the ocean despite living 20 minutes by light rail from the Pacific.

Teachers related these and other problems their students faced to the high rate of poverty at their school. When asked about her students' greatest challenges, science teacher Sarah Hart told me:

What's going against them is society issues. Most of them are poor, some of them lack homes, some of them lack food, so the only food they get is what they get on campus. Some of them lack access to clothing... I mean, when it was pouring rain, some of my kids didn't have sweatshirts.

In addition to problems of housing, food, and clothing, teachers reported that few students had access to computers and the Internet and few had a quiet space where they could do homework. Teachers reported students dropping out due to pregnancy or to help support their families when their parents couldn't find work. For students whose parents were employed, some had to stay home to babysit younger siblings. A large number of students were undocumented immigrants, making it difficult to find funding for college or jobs. With declining opportunities in the United States, some of these students planned to return to Latin America after high school to work or go to school.

Teachers believed that conditions related to poverty caused emotional distress for their students. Living in a group home, transience, parents in prison, absent fathers, and family members using drugs in the home were all believed to be common causes of depression and anxiety. As science teacher Hakima Green stated:

I think that because of the community that they are in, there is a lot of exposure to dysfunction. I know that dysfunctional families occur at all strata, but I think that the way it's couched and so open to them – I mean, middle class folks can go to the psychiatrist and go to rehab or move or whatever, and I don't think a lot of those escape mechanisms are available to the kids. You know, a lot of them need to be in therapy and are not.

In addition to the potential for emotional distress from family conditions, teachers also cited sources of trauma in their students' lives. Students witnessed gang violence in their community and domestic violence at home, and some experienced sexual abuse in their families. Because there were no psychological services on campus, talking with teachers was one of few ways for students to process the trauma they experienced. Often this trauma was personal, but at times it spread among students, as when a burning body was found around the corner from the school's main gate one morning as students were arriving at campus.

Because of such trauma in her students' lives, Spanish teacher Celia Whitten believed that:

For a lot of our kids, our school is the best thing that ever happened to them. I mean, a lot of our kids don't want to go home. We have a lot of

foster kids, you know, single parents, kids living with grandparents, and for a lot of them, school is ten times better than home. It's – one – more quiet. Two – they have friends. It's better. Maybe if they're growing up in a drug house there's not drugs. I mean, as sad as it sounds, that's the best thing they have, is our school.

Though they were aware that the school organization as a whole was characterized by dysfunction, teachers worked hard to create a safe haven in their classroom and to develop supportive relationships with their students. Bunker teachers saw themselves as a buffer between students and the challenges they faced in their community, at home, and in other parts of the school. Teachers found value in this work, and admired others who invested time, money, and emotion in students in the hope of improving their opportunities for the future or providing them with a break from current sources of stress. Teachers were proud to work with:

...people who just really handle their job... in spite of all the other failures of the school. These teachers know that they exist basically as an island, and they can do whatever they want, and they choose to just work their asses off. They don't have to at all... There is no monetary reward for the hard work and dedication. But they do it anyway. And they do it really well (Edward Shaw, English teacher).

Just as teachers admired colleagues who invested in students despite the disorganization of the school, so too did they admire students who attended school and aspired to a better future despite facing great obstacles in their lives. A number of teachers stated that “if I had all that crap going on in my life,” they might not be able to focus on school success. Thus, Bunker teachers considered the students to be their school's greatest strengths, thanks to “their perseverance” and their ability to see themselves as “fighters”:

They know it's shitty and they're like, ‘what do you expect? It's Silverwood...’ It's phenomenal that they haven't given up and they're still there and they're plowing along and playing the game and they're crossing their ‘t's and dotting their ‘i's (Sarah Hart, science teacher).

Although Bunker teachers expressed admiration for their students, their characterization of the teenagers' fortitude still implied that students were fighting an uphill battle – one that, in many cases, would inevitably be lost. In contrast to the optimism of Unity teachers described later in this chapter, Bunker teachers' words bore the weight of a pessimism related to the vast needs of the students and the school, and the lack of organizational resources available to meet those needs. As stated by English teacher Charis Doran:

There's just so many outside factors before you can get in the classroom and teach. So it's like playing the role of truancy cop and of a counselor or a babysitter or a confidant for these students that feel like they have no one to talk to, and they'll bring you their problems. I mean, big time problems. Teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, alcohol abuse. Having to fill out CPS reports for kids that are being abused at home and are too scared to leave school and go back to their house. And then just all the other stuff. Trying to get materials and supplies and trying to make sure that you have everything there, just set up so you can show up and teach.

That's a lot of extra effort. I feel like if there was better support and the school was kind of [pause] more harmonious between the people that work there, you would get better results. Because I feel like we could show up and really do our job and focus on it more. But a lot of extra energy is expelled trying to deal with all these outside issues.

### **Prestige High School**

Prestige teachers described their school as a high-performing institution with a strong emphasis on academic achievement and graduates who matriculated at top-ranked colleges. Located in Juniper, a small, quiet suburban community, Prestige HS primarily served the children of professionals and entertainment industry insiders as well as university professors and research scientists. Prestige High School was the city's only public secondary school, serving grades 7-12, and parents and local community members were heavily involved in its activities. In general, teachers described their relationships with other adults – parents, administrators, and other teachers – as friendly but not deeply involved, although demanding parents could at times draw teachers into emotional conflict. My interviewees described students as cheerful participants in school life and frequently, as a point of pride, observed that the school offered over 50 extracurricular activities including clubs and sports.

As a professional environment, teachers described Prestige as collegial, but indicated that teachers were not intensely involved with one another. The school provided little formal time for collaboration; a major controversy emerged after the scheduling of four days of in-service training/collaboration time on a school calendar that previously had none. Due to intense pressure from parents and the school board, school administrators tended to have short terms at the school. Prestige teachers faced a difficult interview process and intense scrutiny before receiving tenure, although they found that the feedback received from classroom visits during this process was quite valuable. After receiving tenure, teachers were granted broad autonomy, and administrators rarely visited their classrooms. Teachers reported meeting informally with colleagues to exchange ideas, typically at lunch, but such exchanges were not organized by the administration. Whether and how often teachers engaged in informal collaboration depended on personal interest, classroom location, and the dynamics of individual departments.

Many teachers reported desiring more contact with colleagues both for professional collaboration and to socialize. A group of teachers known as “the Sunshine Club” had once organized activities such as birthday parties or barbeques for teachers, but the club had become less active over time. Teachers who left other schools to work at Prestige often missed the collegiality they enjoyed in their previous positions. For example, science teacher Vanessa Farris left a parochial school with a “family atmosphere” for Prestige. In describing her previous school she said:

It was just a really caring environment... I didn't see that at Prestige. It took a while to get to know [other teachers]. There isn't as much interaction at this school. Not necessarily for a lack of want to interact. I think it's just a lack of opportunity.

This “lack of opportunity” was attributed to a number of factors, both organizational and personal. Due to the intense preparation involved in teaching work, “people [we]re busy,” but “it may be because of leadership too.” Korean teacher Jin Lee

told of an administrator's failed attempts to organize events among teachers, "but some teachers didn't like that administrator, so there was no real deep bonding."

Some interviewees also described a generational divide among teachers. History teacher Will Armor told me:

As new people are coming in, I'm getting more of that collegial connection, but with the people that have been there forever, a lot are just like, 'I do my thing and good luck to ya.' It's not universal. There's some really good ones, but a lot of others were, 'my door is closed.'

This generational divide characterized not only relationships, but also teachers' perceptions of the professional quality of their colleagues. Due to declining enrollment, an early retirement incentive had been offered in the year I conducted my interviews. While some older teachers were offended by the incentive and saw their experience as a resource for the campus, some younger teachers were excited to see "new blood" and thought it was "time to get rid of the dinosaurs" who were "stuck in their ways." In general, however, teachers saw the level of professionalism at their school as extremely high. Science teacher Andrew Stetler commented that "there's no flunkies here. Maybe a half dozen are average, and that doesn't cut it so they don't last long. It's just a tremendous group of professionals."

Although teachers expressed pride in the quality of teachers at the school, they were less positive about their administrators. At the time of my interviews, Prestige's principal had been in her current position for less than a year. Teachers had varied reports on her performance. Some felt that she was a hardworking administrator who confronted difficult challenges with local parents and the school board and needed time to develop her skills. Others felt that she did not give teachers enough of her personal attention and did not do enough to support them in battles with parents. Regardless of their view of the current principal, however, it was clear from the interviews that Prestige teachers did not assign much importance to individual administrators. They reported that the position of principal underwent frequent turnover but that their own practices persisted over time. Thus, while individual administrators might offer more or less support to ease the burden of dealing with troublesome parents or students, their leadership made little difference to teachers' daily work. As math teacher Gene Buckland stated: "Principals come and go. Never try to be dependent on something... If you have a good principal, great. If you don't, you have to be able to deal with that."

In contrast to administrators, there was one staff member at Prestige whose efforts seemed to be broadly appreciated – the resource librarian. Teachers reported that she worked hard to provide them with a broad array of teaching resources, and that she gave them "phenomenal" support. For example, Jin Lee, the school's first and only Korean language teacher told me that when she was trying to build the school's program, the librarian "would do anything to help me get my class going," including obtaining copies of films and loaning her laptops and projectors. Teachers boasted that the library itself was a "world class" space, with tables open for studying, available computer resources, and a wide selection of reading and reference books, much like a college library.

Whereas at the other two schools I studied, relationships among teachers and between teachers and administrators shaped the school culture experienced by my interviewees, at Prestige, another group of school-involved adults were critical in determining teachers' experience of their work: parents. Parents, most of them highly

educated in this affluent community, provided important validation but could also be a source of frustration to teachers. Parents' high attendance at Back to School night and their hosting of monthly teacher-appreciation luncheons let teachers know their work was valued. Teachers also appreciated that parents supplemented school learning and held their children accountable for school performance. However, teachers also chafed at parents who placed too much academic pressure on their children, who pushed teachers to change grades, and who condescended to parents or attempted to control their work.

The theme of parents dominated my conversations with Prestige teachers. Even though "you only get one or two a year of the really bad ones," harassment from parents seemed to be an omnipresent possibility for the teachers I interviewed. Teachers told me that worrying about conflicts with parents is "the sort of thing that keeps me up at night; and they backed up their stories of past conflicts with documentation: a record of 190 emails sent by a single parent over the course of a 180 day school year, a file folder of angry or threatening emails maintained for years in case a disciplinary case were to arise, a 26-page syllabus with specific language for each policy to preclude lawyer parents from finding loopholes. As English teacher Claire Unger told me:

The parents are the weakness and the strength [of Prestige HS]. The support is so amazing. Next week, I'm going to go back and get a piece of paper where I make a list of everything I need for my classroom and on Back to School Night, the parents are going to take that list and buy them for me. That's a great thing that parents will provide supplies... In that sense, it's really powerful, but on the other side, there's that darkness where they feel like they have control... That's really scary, and it's one reason why I hesitated to take this job... They've chased principals out and they've chased teachers out.

As illustrated by the quote above, parents played such a critical role in the culture of the school because they were tightly integrated into the organization through the funding they provided. Located in an area with extremely high property values, the district had always done well for funding, but after the passage of Proposition 13, the community worried that the school would struggle to maintain its operations. In response, local parents started a foundation that raised a million dollars annually through parent "suggested contributions" of \$2500 per pupil and additional community fundraising. Thanks to the foundation, the school was able to offer "every AP you can think of, [extracurricular activities], things that most other public schools could not afford to run."

Because of these resources, teachers at Prestige HS experienced a workspace where instruction was carried out with ease. For basic supplies, they were able to make personal expenditures and then request reimbursements; for more expensive technology, they could request individual grants from the parents' foundation. Teachers at Prestige reported regularly using LCD projectors and whiteboards in their classrooms. Many teachers had document cameras and some used Smartboard technology; one science teacher even reported using a clicker system. Teachers were able to order special labs, pre-designed curricula, and educational DVDs. An additional advantage of working in a wealthy and highly educated community was students' and parents' access to and facility with technology. Teachers reported having students make Powerpoint presentations, build spreadsheets in Excel, and film and edit digital movies related to classroom

material. One English teacher reported using an online software package that allowed students to post questions to a message board, have online chats about the class discussion in real time, and seamlessly transfer written work from school to home using cloud computing. Ubiquitous Internet access also allowed parents to monitor their children's grades online in real time rather than waiting for quarterly report cards.

Because of the school's focus on high-level academic performance, my interviewees worried about the welfare of the "middle student," who neither earned top grades in AP and honors courses nor benefitted from the extra support of an IEP.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the district had recently launched an initiative to reach these students, for example, by allowing teachers to design alternate curriculum for students believed to fall in this category. In addition to worrying that "the middle student" was not being properly accommodated academically, teachers also worried about the self-esteem of these students. For example, teachers shared that the school's annual "college t-shirt day" where seniors wore the shirt of the school they matriculated to could be "public humiliation" for students who were not planning to attend a selective institution. English teacher Lucy Monahan described the challenges facing "the middle student" in this way:

I feel really sorry for kids who are just average kids – bright enough, not geniuses in any particular area, but just great kids – because they feel like second class citizens. The parents think of them that way, their peers think of them that way, and they think of themselves that way.

Teachers worried about other challenges their students faced as well. In addition to the "middle student," students who did not grow up in the community sometimes had trouble "fitting in" with long-term friendship groups at Prestige. Teachers also worried about the "pressure" all students faced from their peers and from the school to involve themselves in extracurricular activities and to achieve high grades. Teachers believed that the "pressure to get into colleges, the expectation that you have to go everywhere and do everything" caused their students to experience emotional stress. This stress could have negative psychological and physiological consequences for teens at Prestige:

I've had some emotional – you know, eating disorders and stuff like that. 'Cause of the stress. And some of them have been hospitalized. So when I think about a great challenge, for some of them the challenge is they're given something that they can't do, and they don't have an outlet. (Gene Buckland, math teacher)

In addition to pressure at school, some students also faced challenges in their home lives. Teachers described parental divorce as a major problem, both in terms of the emotional stress of the transition and the practical challenges of living in two separate households. Although the school had an active Gay-Straight Alliance, one teacher who self-identified as gay speculated that it might be difficult to grow up gay in Juniper, a community with a large population of conservative Christians. Teachers also worried that students were not sufficiently supervised at home because parents were divorced, because they travelled for work or pleasure and left the child at home, or because they worked long hours. Spanish teacher Forest Lasky told me:

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<sup>19</sup> Individualized Education Program – planned accommodations and support for students with learning disabilities.



A lot of people say Juniper has the reverse situation of Silverwood, where you have absentee parents or single parent families where the parent's always working and latchkey kids. You got latchkey kids in Juniper [too]; it's just that they have more money... You've got these kids who are home alone who've got a lot of resources but no discipline.

This lack of supervision and discipline combined with abundant financial resources explained a number of the ills that teachers felt troubled their students. Teachers reported that some students acted with wanton cruelty towards others, as in the example of two boys who displayed a videotape of themselves having sex with a developmentally disabled student, or in the case of a senior girl who posted a freshman's semi-nude photo on Myspace, along with the younger girl's phone number and the note that she was an "easy lay." Teachers also worried about students' drug and alcohol use. An assembly warning about the dangers of drunk driving was held before prom, and teachers were frustrated by parents who allowed students to have parties at home with alcohol. Teachers also raised issues related to illegal drugs, reporting that thanks to the money available to students, Prestige students had a "boutique drug problem" and that "the amount of drugs these kids have access to is so scary."

Despite being aware that students used drugs and drank alcohol, teachers felt they had little power to regulate this behavior not only outside of school, but also on campus. Prestige was an open campus with light security consisting of two part time security guards. Most teachers were not concerned about security, and reported feeling very safe on campus. However, a few teachers reported that minimal security made drug problems difficult to catch. Students sent out mass-text warnings when an outside contractor brought drug-sniffing dogs or local sheriffs came to campus, making it easy to hide illegal activity at the school.

Despite struggles with overbearing parents and worries about various types of student stress, overall, teachers at Prestige were gratified to work at a school that was considered to be an "academic powerhouse" where "99% of students go on to higher education." Teachers at Prestige viewed themselves as a team of "professionals" who provided challenging academic instruction to "future leaders" who were "going to make something of their lives." Despite occasional negativity, teachers felt an overall positive atmosphere on a campus where parents, teachers, and students subscribed to the mission of the school. Spanish teacher Forest Lasky stated:

You go to a pep rally and it feels like it's still 1970... It is an enjoyable place to work. I love it. I absolutely love my job and not too many teachers who have been around as long as I have can say that. I really do enjoy it. And it's not just the classroom. It does have to do with this overall culture.

This positive, school-centered culture buoyed teachers through struggles in their work and allowed them to feel connected to the school as a whole even as they wished for better communication among colleagues. The culture of Prestige reassured teachers that the work of academic instruction was normatively positive, and teachers gained emotional rewards from their students' school success. In addition, in comparison to other schools, the workspace of Prestige HS assured teachers that their work was valued, even in the face of conflicts with parents.

### **Unity High School**

Teachers' historical narratives of Unity High School described a U-shaped trajectory: once a great institution, the school had fallen into disrepute, but was making its way back to greatness through the mechanism of the school "reinvention." Teachers cited a number of successful alumni, including a famous African American athlete who surmounted color barriers in professional sports. Despite a decline in the school's reputation that accompanied white flight in the early 1970s, the school remained academically and athletically strong and had a vibrant culture of school pride until the late 1980s. During this time, scandals related to teacher molestation of students and a succession of bad principals contributed to the school's decline. By the early 2000s, the school was struggling academically such that it failed to meet state targets for improvement for five years in a row. Threatened with a shutdown by the state, the school board instead opted to "reinvent" Unity High School and reopen the school under a California Partnership Academy model.

The reinvention meant that a new team of administrators was brought in, and all teachers had to reapply for their jobs under a rigorous evaluation process. The new model also brought organizational changes. The campus was divided into four small academies that were focused on a particular career area, and teachers were required to offer coordinated curricula within these academies. This meant intense collaboration for teachers, who weekly met with both their academy and their department. Teachers also communicated more directly with administrators, as each academy was assigned an assistant principal who coordinated with faculty.

Since the reinvention, test scores climbed steadily and a sense of optimism pervaded the campus, leading teachers to report, "we're five years on the upswing now." The school's reinvention brought a number of changes that were welcomed by Unity teachers. The first of these was access to much-needed resources. Prior to the reinvention, teachers had difficulty acquiring sufficient teaching materials including basic supplies such as paper or chalk, instructional materials like lab equipment and books, and instructional enhancements like audiovisual equipment. After the reinvention, the school's participation in the California Partnership Academy system provided teachers with access to much-needed additional funding. Thus, many of the teachers I spoke with had LCD projectors in their rooms, and the school was equipped with computer labs that allowed career technology teachers to teach courses in digital film production and graphic design. As one teacher stated:

The reinvention meant that we got attention. I want to make sure that that's pointed out, because before the reinvention, we got ignored. We were denied supplies; we were not supported. The Williams [settlement] demanded that they support us with instructional materials and clean facilities. So with the reinvention, we got the facilities, we got the funding, we got what we needed so the kids are getting what they need.

In addition to these material changes, the school's reinvention provided new opportunities for teachers to develop a sense of pride in the school and close relationships among colleagues. In my interviews with Unity teachers, I was struck by their strong *esprit de corps*. In the accreditation report to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Unity HS included a letter from a teacher representative that stated, "Its fun to work at Unity because we know we are all in the same boat – either we row together or we fail." This did not appear to be empty rhetoric. Echoing the views of others, English

teacher Vernon Griffith stated “there’s a really close collaborative spirit that happens here.” Contrasting Unity HS to other schools where teachers felt isolated within their classrooms, history teacher Harry Oden said, “here we have a happy family. We talk.” As English teacher Brenda Cox told a newly hired staff member:

We really do work in teams. This is what [other schools] purport to be.

We really are rubbing up against one another and having our own opinions squashed. Trying to find an equal ground.

Some basic organizational factors contributed to this sense of camaraderie. First, because the schedule set aside two periods a week for teacher collaboration, teachers had a strong sense that their work was coordinated and that they knew other teachers well. Practically, this time spent together made teachers’ work easier. It allowed them to share assessments and teaching materials, and made it possible for teachers to monitor students’ progress and strategize for individual improvement across grades and subjects. As English teacher Catrina Paxton put it, this collaboration involved “a lot of ‘José is not doing well in my class. How is he doing in your class?’” Socially, the collaboration allowed teachers to develop connections that moved beyond the professional realm and into the personal. Math teacher Alvin Walton demonstrated the connection between the practical and social benefits of collaboration time when he said:

Every Tuesday, we get together to work on assessments and curriculum, share experiences as far as what’s happening in classroom, bounce ideas off each other. It’s easy to find a group of people you gel with. We’re friends. They’re people I hang out with, not just people I work with.

The second organizational factor contributing to teachers’ sense of *esprit de corps* is perhaps less intuitively important: the reinvention of the school required all teachers to reapply for their jobs. While many teachers initially found this discouraging, at the time of the interviews four years later, the reapplication process provided them with the conviction that their colleagues had *elected* to work at the school and were of high quality. This allowed teachers to respond to my question about the school’s greatest strengths with answers like: “That we have so many great teachers that want to be there. If you’re at Unity, you wanted to be there.” Although there were exceptions to the rule, because of the reinvention process, interviewees felt that at Unity High School:

The teacher commitment level is through the roof. We have teachers who put their all into teaching, and not just teaching but extracurricular things like yearbook, or putting on musicals and plays, or coaching sports.

The organizational changes wrought by the school’s reinvention engendered a strong sense of trust and optimism among teachers. In addition to current conditions, however, Unity teachers also drew upon institutional memory to cultivate a shared vision of a halcyon past that held promise for a bright future. This vision was shared throughout the school community, but it was especially reinforced by teachers who were also alumni of the school and members of the Amapola community. For example, math teacher Alvin Walton had grown up in the neighborhood of Unity HS but attended private school. Alvin chose to teach at Unity because he had admired the school since childhood. When I asked about the school’s history, he responded:

Big picture history – Way back in the 50s or 60s, Unity was demographically not like what it is today. There were more white students, more affluent students. And people will tell you that it was a

powerhouse academically and athletically. Moving into the era... when I was in high school, in the late '80s and early '90s, we were just like in awe of Unity because all the cool kids went there. They had coolest clothes, knew the best dances, were good at sports, always throwing parties. I knew kids who went there who were the smartest kids or who were the most athletic. It seemed like a really well-rounded place and they had school spirit that was unbelievable.

Alvin's portrayal of Unity as an academic and athletic powerhouse marked by a sense of school spirit created a sense, shared by other teachers, that the promises of the reinvention were attainable. Instead of building from the ground up, Unity teachers only had to put the school on its "way back to greatness."

The pride and optimism engendered by this institutional memory also provided teachers with a status shield against what many described as the school's greatest challenge: community members' negative perception of Unity High School. Due to local awareness of the school's history of white flight, the organizational problems that precipitated the reinvention, and the school's location in the section of the city with the highest concentration of low-income, Black and Latino families, teachers felt that their school was considered the "black sheep of the district." They complained that the local newspaper regularly maligned the school and that a number of school board members were overtly or covertly critical of the school. Some community members, especially local affluent whites, treated the school with condescension, "looking down their nose at Unity."

In addition to the psychological consequences of confronting external stigmatization of their school, Unity teachers reported that their school's poor reputation created structural obstacles to teaching. At the time of the reinvention, the district transitioned high school assignment from a neighborhood model to an "open enrollment" plan that allowed local parents to transfer their children to any school in the district. Teachers complained that this meant that some of the parents who were *most* involved in their students' education chose to move their students to other schools, depriving Unity of important family resources. In addition, teachers believed that the district took advantage of these enrollment patterns to artificially inflate test scores at the district's other three high schools by "dumping" students with behavioral problems or academic challenges at Unity through forced mid-year transfers. Unity was therefore left with the "largest Special Ed population in the district. We have the largest foster care population in the district. So we have the largest of the socially disadvantaged student population in the district." This created a "catch-22" for teachers struggling to raise test scores:

Like, we're expected to do the most but they keep piling more stuff on. And I don't think we get treated fairly. Not by the district and not by the community at large at all. At all. There's a lot of good teachers at that school working really, really hard and we've got arguably the toughest batch of kids, so there just doesn't seem to be any – people don't take that into the equation. Like, oh, you have the lowest scores 3 years running. It's like, 'yeah, okay, lets talk about why' (Seth Daley, English teacher).

In explaining test score differences between Unity HS and other schools, teachers told me that their students faced a variety of obstacles outside of the classroom. As Special Education teacher Hazel Tarver stated, "the greatest challenges facing the

students are the challenges they face in their lives outside of school.” These challenges, related to the low socioeconomic status of the community, included hunger, absent parents due to abandonment or imprisonment, physical and sexual abuse, witnessing violence against family or community members, and parental joblessness. History teacher Emilion Lnadrum told me that poverty presented a great obstacle to schooling because “our kids are from broken homes, and a lot of the broken homes are symptoms of poverty either because of joblessness and the tension and stress that creates, drug abuse, there’s a lot of drug abuse in the families, moving around a lot, transience and all that.” These factors meant that students felt “stress and despair” that made it difficult to focus on school and created a temptation to fall in with peers who provided a distraction from both difficulty at home and from school success by “ditching class, getting high, having sex.”

Even when students were motivated to do well, however, Unity teachers still reported facing challenges to school success. Due to differences in previous schooling and educational resources in the home:

[Unity students] just have so much that they need to cover academically to be on the same level as their peers in more affluent communities that it’s just hard to do that in the number of hours that we have because we need to remediate, we need to get on grade level and really we need to push the rigor as well. (Tara Jensen, science teacher)

Further, academically successful students were not guaranteed a path to college. Some parents needed students to help provide an income at home, rather than go to school, and others could not afford the cost of college tuition. Students’ citizenship status also presented a major obstacle. Science teacher Tara Jensen told the disheartening story of two undocumented students who had won an engineering competition and were offered internships at a local research institute but had to decline because the institute received federal funding and would check their immigration status.

In addition to student challenges, Unity HS teachers also faced some organizational challenges within their school, even after the reinvention. One problem teachers reported was high turnover of early-career teachers related both to the practice of giving budget-related “Reduction in Force” layoff notices to the newest teachers and to insufficient attention to the particular needs of new teachers. Indeed, two of the teachers I interviewed were disappointed to receive Reduction in Force notices at the end of their second year. A third teacher, who was awarded a national teaching award in the year following our interview, also received a Reduction in Force notice, but was rehired on the condition that he take on the additional (unpaid) responsibilities of Lead Teacher for his academy and student council advisor.

There was also room for improvement at Unity in terms of leadership and communication. Though access to resources expanded after the reinvention, use of materials varied among teachers based on their personal knowledge of how to apply for outside grants and utilize ties to local universities and research institutes. Some of this knowledge was informally shared among teachers, and department chairs or academy leaders would also write grants on behalf of others, but there did not appear to be a formal mechanism to ensure access to resources across the campus. Although teachers generally felt supported by their administration, they also complained that the school did not do enough to maintain clear and consistent policies regarding discipline, tardies, and

absences. Finally, despite widespread optimism among Unity teachers, they also expressed anxiety about the tenuousness of the budget. With declining funding from the state, they worried that they would not be able to maintain the academies or keep a sufficient teaching staff.

Teachers confronted challenges to their work, but the workspace of Unity HS fostered the widespread belief that teachers did so in service of students and alongside committed colleagues. As I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 5, within this setting, *obstacles* to education could be converted into *opportunities* for care. Thus, when asked to name the schools greatest strength, a number of teachers responded in the same vein, referring to the collective spirit they experienced in their workspace. English teacher Catrina Paxton put it this way:

I would say the teachers' commitment to the students. Almost every one of my colleagues loves being there and wouldn't think about leaving and finds the sparks in these children that shows us that its worth it. That they [students] appreciate what we're doing and they're trying their best to work hard.

### **Relational (Mis-)Trust**

In the literature on school-as-workplace, there is general consensus that teachers' working conditions vary widely based upon the conditions of the school, the local community, and the larger society in which the school is embedded. Although schools share some common features, each individual school presents a unique organizational context that affects teachers' subjective experiences of their work (Pollard 1982). In addition to variations in material resources, student demographics, and administrative structure, every school is characterized by a unique "faculty culture,"<sup>20</sup> or "the distinctive blend of norms, values, and accepted modes of professional practice, both formal and informal, that prevails among colleagues" (Cherubini 2009:83). Faculty cultures are both constituted by schools' organizational and material conditions and transcend them as professional communities develop shared meanings within their school context that take on a cultural life of their own (Dreeben 1973).

In this chapter, I described teachers' common experiences of their school as a workspace. Through these common experiences, at each school, the faculty developed a unique culture that structured their interactions as colleagues. This faculty culture was characterized by collectivism at Unity HS, by discord at Bunker, and by individualism at Prestige. That is, teachers at Bunker High School felt that they worked in isolation as each teacher attempted to create a "safe space" for students, and coordination with other teachers or administrators was not considered a normal part of the work of teaching at that school. At Prestige, such interaction was not unusual, but it was also considered non-essential. The faculty culture of Prestige conveyed to teachers that they should act as professionals within a loosely organized but generally well functioning workplace. In contrast to the other two schools, Unity High School teachers had a faculty culture that encouraged teachers to work closely with one another under a shared vision of creating opportunities for students' social mobility.

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<sup>20</sup> Cherubini uses the term "school culture." However, I prefer the term "faculty culture", which makes clear that while specific to the school, this is not necessarily the culture of students or other school actors who are not faculty.

According to previous studies of faculty cultures, collegiality among teachers and a sense of shared organizational mission are important factors that affect teachers' job satisfaction (Lee, Dedrick et al. 1991; McLaughlin and Talbert 2001) and enthusiasm for their students (Metz 1983; Flores and Day 2006). These factors are important because they contribute to developing *relational trust*, or the sense that other members of the school will fulfill their own role obligations in pursuit of shared organizational goals (Bryk and Schneider 2002). In "loosely coupled" systems like schools, where each individual largely works autonomously from others and is not heavily scripted in his or her actions, relational trust enables workers to coordinate their work and achieve organizational goals (Weick 1976).

In their study of school reform implementation at three Chicago elementary schools, Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider (2002) found that collegiality and shared professional mission among faculty are not the only important elements of relational trust; trust must also be cultivated among all school actors including administrators, students, and parents. Before closing this chapter, it is important to examine critical "flashpoints" that emerged in the interviews – incidents or issues that were sources of deep frustration for teachers – because these flashpoints indicate spaces where relational trust was lacking between the faculty and other school actors in each environment (parents at Prestige, administrators at Bunker, and local outsiders at Unity). These flashpoints illuminate major obstacles to teachers' ability to care for their students and to feel comfortable within the workspace of their school.

#### *Prestige HS – Collaboration Days*

Individual teachers at Prestige High School raised a number of incidents that might seem broadly alarming – for example, times when students defaced the school with racist graffiti or engaged in sexual harassment. However, it was uncommon for any of these individual incidents to be raised across multiple interviews. Likewise, although recurring themes came up when teachers discussed conflicts with parents or students, these conflicts were largely individualized. The only common flashpoint that emerged across interviews at this particular school had to do with teachers' hope that they might receive an opportunity for shared communication – the possible addition of four in-service days to the school year. For teachers at Prestige HS, the shared source of conflict, and of relational mistrust was powerful parents who opposed this potential change.

As I described earlier, teachers at Prestige had little formal time for collaboration. In order to increase collaboration time and provide training, the school board approved the addition of four in-service training days to the school calendar at the end of the school year in which I conducted my interviews. These days were to be created by adding minutes to the school day, and would go into effect the following fall.

The teachers with whom I spoke supported this schedule change. As one interviewee described it:

Teachers need that spark to get them fired up. They need that time to meet with other teachers. We're one of the last districts to try to implement time in the school day for teachers to meet. They're adding four days to the schedule next year... Of course, the parents are up in arms about it.

Although they looked forward to the change, some teachers were pessimistic about whether it would truly take place. They observed that recent school board meetings were

“packed” with parents complaining about a scheduling change that meant their children would be home for four extra days and that their children would be picked up later from school. Teachers largely dismissed these concerns, but worried that parents might have the power to overturn the school board’s decision.

Though this may seem like a relatively minor conflict (a difference of four days’ worth of scheduling either way), this flashpoint emerged as a common source of irritation across many interviews with Prestige teachers. It reflects two shared concerns among this group of interviewees: that parent’s power in the district might be wielded capriciously and to the detriment of teachers, and that teachers could benefit from a stronger collegial environment at their school. This source of conflict also foreshadowed important implications for teachers’ ability to care for their students that I will discuss in detail in Chapter 5: at Prestige HS, wealthy, powerful parents, and the individualistic approach to caring for children they supported, stood as a major obstacle to teachers’ ability to foster emotional relationships with students.

#### *Bunker HS – Teacher Assault*

When I interviewed Bunker High School teachers, they frequently asked me if I had heard about the teacher who was assaulted earlier that semester. At first, when teachers raised the topic, I thought they did so because the incident was a frightening example of the potential threat that students posed. Instead, teachers’ stories took on a different tone. The incident of the assault was a simple but physically and emotionally difficult confrontation between an individual student and teacher – something my interviewees viewed as a rare but foreseeable risk of work with adolescents. The assault itself was not the central focus of these stories; instead, over time, the incident came to represent teachers’ disgust with a school administration they considered to be disorganized and unresponsive to teachers’ needs.

In describing the assault on Charis Doran, teachers were hazy about the details of the incident and what precipitated it. In most accounts, a female teacher either confiscated a male students’ backpack or disciplined him verbally, and he later returned either alone or with a friend or with a group of boys and either jumped the teacher or punched her in the nose. In Charis Doran’s own words:

Well, I was assaulted at school last year. There was – and he wasn’t even a student in one of my classes. But he was angry because I had reported him truant earlier that day, and he called a couple of his buddies who were not students at school to come onto campus and they came to my classroom and he ended up sucker punching me in the side of the face and basically just cussing me out and running off campus.

For Charis, this incident was upsetting in and of itself, but the administration’s lack of response compounded the trauma of the physical assault. Following the assault:

I took the last few months off school. I was on leave. Because I didn’t feel safe and I didn’t get support from the administration and they didn’t report it to the district and they didn’t follow through with any of the legalities of the incident, so I didn’t go back.

Charis filed a grievance with the union and hired an attorney to sue the district for workman’s compensation. She planned to return to the school in the fall because she was unable to find another teaching job. She expressed hope that because the school was



getting a new group of administrators the next year, things would be better, but she was doubtful.

For Charis, the fact of getting hit by a student represented an initial administrative failure because administrators, not teachers, should manage trancies and because security did not prevent the boy from bringing non-students to campus. The greater betrayal, however, was the administration's lack of support for her after the incident. Other teachers decried this as well, and a counselor told me that the school failed to follow through with filing a police report against the student. The incident thus became a flashpoint among teachers, representing administrators' failure to govern the campus and their lack of support for teachers. Teachers also used this flashpoint, and their own haziness regarding the event, to illustrate the lack of communication between administrators and teachers and among teachers at Bunker. Science teacher Sarah Hart told me:

[After the assault, Charis] left; she went on leave of some sort. We didn't even get a memo saying what happened. I only know what happened because the kids called me and said 'Ms. Hart, are you okay? The other white teacher got punched in the face.' There<sup>21</sup> was no memo about it, no discussion at the teachers' meeting. To make matters worse, we didn't even send a card to her. As a faculty, we didn't send a 'get well soon,' 'thinking about you' – nothing! That's fucked up. So I ended up sending a card, I had a few people sign it, because it's just fucked up. And to tell you the truth, when I heard that, I couldn't identify the teacher. I had no idea who she was. But that's what you do as a human. It's just humanity. And Bunker lacks it in every aspect.

Although Sarah Hart described Bunker as lacking humanity in "every aspect," one group did not receive blame in teachers' accounts of the assault incident – students. Sarah and most other Bunker teachers were careful to make explicit to me that their disdain for the school did not extend to students as a group, whom they admired. In fact, teachers pointed me to a recording of a recent school board meeting where Bunker students organized as a group to voice a number of grievances against school administrators, including embezzling of student funds, lack of family support services in Spanish, wasted instructional minutes, and poorly managed standardized testing. In describing the inadequate security on campus, many of these students raised the incident of the assault and expressed genuine outrage that a teacher had been hit. I asked Charis if she knew about the meeting, and she replied:

It was awesome. I heard that from a couple teachers that were at that meeting and then from a couple of district administrators, and I was so touched by that. For it to get to that point where the kids felt like they had to go to the school board meeting and talk about it – that tells you something about how things are handled at the school. They

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<sup>21</sup> I interviewed five white woman teachers at Bunker, and other white women taught at the school as well. Thus, the label "the other white teacher" is not a factual characterization of the teaching population; instead, it likely pertains to the racially divisive climate among faculty at Bunker I describe in the next chapter.

[administrators] just wanted to sweep it under the rug and not do anything about it. They just wanted to pretend like it never happened.

Charis and Sarah's comments here indicate that teachers at Bunker High School had a strong desire for relational trust with other school actors. They longed for support from their administrators, wished for more human relationships with other teachers, and worked hard to foster caring relationships with their students. However, the disorganized and fragmented workspace of Bunker High School posed a major obstacle to the cultivation of this relational trust. As I will show in Chapter 5, teachers at Bunker High School worked to provide care for their students, but they were unable to form the trusting networks required to turn this work into a unified and successful school mission.

*Unity HS – The “Melee”*

The flashpoint that Unity teachers described reflected teachers' feelings about local school outsiders' negative perceptions of the school and the effects those perceptions could have on teachers and students. Almost every teacher I interviewed at Unity told me a remarkably similar story beginning with a scuffle between two students and ending with a police lockdown and a front-page headline in the local paper reading “Racially charged melee breaks out at Unity High.”

According to the teachers, the initial incident was a simple fight between two boys. One boy was Black, the other Latino, though teachers said the boys were friends and that race hadn't figured into the fight. One boy threw a water balloon and the other boy reacted angrily. A scuffle began, and students got excited, swarming the fighting boys. Cautious because of a recent incident where a Unity student had been shot and killed at a weekend house party, administrators and teachers decided to call a lockdown, ushering students into classrooms and calling police to campus. When the police arrived in full riot gear with batons out, however, they aggravated the incident and presented a hostile face to students. Newspaper reporters arrived on campus and reported the incident as a race riot, though teachers directly told reporters this was not the case.

The fight itself was not a source of trouble for teachers. Many teachers, in fact, felt proud of how quickly they were able to divert students from watching the scuffle and organize them into classrooms. Instead, the problem came in the form of the response of local outsiders – with overly aggressive police intervention, an unbalanced and “racially charged” negative headline from a newspaper teachers felt had a vendetta against the school, and subsequent negative comments from community members. When I asked career teacher Yvonne Starr about the greatest challenges facing her school, she replied:

Perception. People say throw a positive video up, call the [local newspaper]. All right, so we do that. Justice [a senior accepted at UC Berkeley] got his acceptance letter the day of the ‘melee.’ So, it happened that I had guest speakers in my class that day. They got caught in the lockdown. One was so disgusted by how [the police] handled it – you would have thought kids were murdered, the way that they handled it. So reporters are outside, and she's like ‘this kid got into Berkeley, why aren't y'all talking about that?’ They're like, ‘so, what happened inside?’ That's what they want to hear. That's what they want to see.

In contrasting her student's accomplishments to reporters' desire to “see” and “hear” a fight at the school, Yvonne described teachers' feeling that some local community members not only misperceived the school based upon its difficult past, but

deliberately ignored positive aspects of Unity HS to present the school in a negative light. This feeling was expressed in other interviews:

[There was a] fight that was treated like a riot. Helicopters all over the place, 40 police on campus. Had the situation warranted that type of response, I would have been thankful for it, but since it didn't, I was just kind of like, 'what is this? You're creating mayhem?' I think it was all done with the kids' safety in mind, but I think if the same thing had happened at any of the other schools [in Amapola], the reaction would have been far less severe. It would have been like, 'oh, kids will be kids.' But because it was us, it was like it's a race riot or something. It's completely overblown. Yeah, so I think that's kind of a clue to what the community at large's view of us is.

The so-called "melee" served as a critical flashpoint for Unity teachers who believed that they were working together to improve outcomes for their students but who also felt embattled by the larger community. Thus, the pseudonym I chose for the school took on an additional, ironic meaning in this context – though Unity High School had strong, internal relational trust, that trust was broken in interactions with outsiders in the local community.

Teachers' descriptions of the "melee" make clear that teachers saw themselves as united with their students against outsiders' negative perceptions. In addition to highlighting a general conflict with outsiders, the melee served as a flashpoint for teachers because of the accusation that the fight was racially motivated. Throughout the story, the newspaper not only described the school as a place that was violent and out of control, but also showed that the *reason* the school was violent was because of the particular racial and class makeup of its student body. In the next chapter I will explore teachers' acute perception that their school was stigmatized by locals based on its current race and class demographics and its racialized history.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described the *workspace* conditions of Prestige HS, Unity HS, and Bunker HS as they were experienced by teachers. These workspaces fostered particular faculty cultures: Prestige had a faculty culture focused on individual achievement; Bunker had a faculty culture focused on protecting students from external chaos within the bounded space of the classroom; the faculty culture at Unity focused on working collectively to promote upward mobility for socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Within each of these spaces, faculty also mistrusted other school actors who threatened their work and were therefore widely perceived as sources of trouble. Across the interviews, these sites of mistrust emerged as "flashpoints," or places where teachers had a consistent discourse for expressing common anger. At Prestige, my interviewees were upset with powerful parents who impeded good teaching; at Bunker, teachers were disheartened by an unresponsive administration which failed to support faculty members even in the extreme case of assault; At Unity, teachers contended with negative perceptions of the school from local outsiders, captured by the overblown incident of the "melee." The remaining chapters will detail how these unique conditions affected the local meanings attached to racial-ethnicity, class, and family; what practices and ideals teachers used to experience their work as meaningful; and the contours of care within each school.

## Chapter 4

### Race, Class, and Teacher Emotion

Organizational structures and the quality of relationships among important school actors – teachers, administrators, parents, and staff – shaped the faculty cultures of Bunker, Prestige, and Unity High Schools. Alongside these factors, however, was another important component of school social milieus: each was mired in a history of white flight. These histories produced conditions of quarantined disadvantage that influenced teachers' perceptions of student needs and the types of care they tried to provide (Chapters 5 and 6) as well as racialized and classed expectations of parents and families (Chapter 7). These histories also produced local meanings of racial-ethnicity and class that had to be negotiated as teachers sought to find a place within their particular schools.

Looking only at the demographics of the three schools I studied, it appears that race privilege and class advantage are nearly inseparable in my research. Two of the schools I studied served student populations that were majority low-income and majority Latino and African American, and one of the schools served students that were nearly all wealthy and majority white and Asian American. However, when I delved into teachers' descriptions of *belonging* within the space of their schools, I found that the particular history and faculty culture of each school led to unique configurations of racialized and classed meanings. These meanings often became clear in emotionally charged moments when teachers described taking either pride or shame in their labor at Prestige, Unity, and Bunker High Schools.

Pride and shame are two of the most fundamental social emotions, based in our sense of security in our social bonds (Scheff 2000). We are able to feel pride when we belong, and we feel a very lonely sense of shame when our social bonds are tenuous and we feel actively stigmatized and excluded. At all three schools I studied, teachers' feeling of being bonded with their school was threatened by the presence of the schools' history of white flight – that is, racial boundary lines had been drawn around each school, and teachers had to negotiate these lines to identify with their school.

This chapter explores how teachers negotiated this threat by cultivating a feeling of pride with their faculty peers. What social resources did teachers draw upon to strengthen their bonds, and how did particular experiences of white flight strengthen or weaken these resources? Though the configuration of racialized and classed meanings varied greatly across the three schools, taken together, teachers' experiences of pride and shame were anchored in awareness of the living implications of history for the reproduction of inequality.

#### **Unity – The Black and Mexican Sheep**

Unity High School was marked by a strong sense of *relational trust* among teachers (Bryk and Schneider 2002). This trust was supported by organizational factors, including a schedule that set aside two 90-minute periods per week for collaboration among members of departments and academies and an intensive reapplication process that provided teachers with a sense that their colleagues were highly qualified. This relational trust is reflected in African American social science teacher Curtis Murray's statement that:

I was really glad when this reinvention came about because it brought in some people that really cared, that really want to be with those kids and really give them the time – the quality time that they needed. And it's beginning to show results now – we are climbing up – up the stairway, as they say. Our [state test] scores are improving and it's a whole different atmosphere.

When Unity teachers articulated their pride to me, however, it was not without a sense of defensiveness about the *context* of the strong stigmatization that came from outside of the school based on the school's racial-ethnic and class demographics and its history of white flight. For example, after telling me, "the school is on its way back to a greatness" and "pretty much everybody [referring to teachers] who's here came because they wanted to be here," Vernon Griffith recounted that during the reinvention, a \$5000 bonus was advertised to all district teachers to give them an incentive to apply to Unity. No teacher from outside of Unity HS took advantage of this incentive. One might expect this story to be told with shame, but Vernon told the story proudly. He ended his explanation with a satisfied: "*that's* who Unity is."

A number of factors related to the historical and current context of the city of Amapola led Unity teachers to feel embattled in relation to the school district and the local community. At the time of the reinvention, the district moved from a "home school" assignment model to a "schools of choice" model, so in addition to the drain on the student population caused by Amapola's many private schools, a number of public school parents opted to place their students in one of the city's other three high schools. Unity teachers felt that the community perceived Unity as the district's "ghetto" school and as a dangerous place. Negative statements made by some school board members and by a local newspaper that sensationalized trouble at Unity bolstered this perception.

When teachers discussed the external stigmatization of Unity HS, they did not do so in race-neutral terms. Instead, they showed a strong awareness of the school's history of white flight and its vulnerability to stigma related to the school's student demographics and its location in an area with the city's highest proportion of low-income and African American and Latino families. Many teachers described the school as the "black sheep" of the district, but one teacher directly connected this metaphor to racial stigma. When I asked him to describe the community's perception of the school, Alvin Walton, an African American math teacher, replied, "I'd say a black sheep. That's the first thing that comes to mind. Black sheep. Or I really want to say, the Black and Mexican sheep."

By describing the school as a Black and Mexican sheep, Alvin drew attention to the ways in which the school was *racially* stigmatized by the outside community. Many teachers discussed this connection to racism at length, naming school board members, the local newspaper, and white Amapola parents as responsible for this stigma, as in the following exchange with Seth Daley, a white English teacher:

Jessica: Can you tell me a little about the history of Unity, what you know of it?

Seth: [laughingly names two infamous graduates of the school]. No, but I do know some of the history. I know the student population has changed dramatically, and I do know that Amapola was one of first cities to have forced busing. There was a huge backlash due to that *because people are racist*. And that's why there's all the private schools there.

By stating “because people are racist” as the reason for white flight, Seth explicitly eschewed colorblind explanations of local perceptions of Unity HS and Unity’s position in relation to other schools in the area. This was also true of white special education teacher Brian Yates, who responded to the same question with:

I’ve talked to a lot of people over the years. I know exactly what happened. I know about the busing. I know exactly what happened with Unity and with Amapola HS and I know that the open enrollment is a big sham. The waiting lists are a big sham. And that generally, the way that they’ve been able to increase the APIs at the other schools is by basically sending everything over to [schools in the majority non-white area]. That’s segregation, bro.

In responding to a potentially apolitical question about history, Brian not only immediately referred to the city’s racial politics by framing his response in terms of “busing,” but also connected a history of segregation to the current political situation in Amapola schools. Quotes like Brian’s make clear that Unity teachers considered their school as not only historically but also currently racially stigmatized within the district.

There were many possible responses to this stigmatization. White teachers, especially, might have chosen to distance themselves from racial stereotypes without naming racism. Instead, Unity teachers’ collective pride incorporated an element of *identification* with African American and Latino students that countered racism from outsiders. For example, after he described the current state of “segregation” in Amapola, I had the following exchange with Brian Yates:

Jessica: How long do you think you’ll stay at Unity?

Brian: As long as I can. I told them they’re going to have to remove me kicking and screaming. I actually had the opportunity to go to Amapola<sup>22</sup> High School and I said no.

Brian’s decision to stay at Unity until he was removed “kicking and screaming” indicates that he assigned a *moral value* to working at Unity and that he had chosen a *shared fate* with the school and his students. In the following exchange, biracial African American and Spanish social science teacher Emilio Landrum exhibits a similar sense of shared fate, and captures the anti-racist pride that characterized the collective identity of Unity teachers:

Jessica: What would you say is the school’s greatest strength?

Emilio: The sense of community. And that’s partly because of [the academy system] and partly because it’s Unity and students who are there feel like it’s more than just a high school, its really – when you take in the

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<sup>22</sup> Amapola High School was a large, diverse high school located across town from Community. Bearing the city’s moniker, the school was Amapola’s “white” high school before 1970. At the time of my interviews, the school served over 2000 students who were 54% Latino, 16% African American, and 19% white (including a large population of Middle Eastern ethnic minority students); 63% of students qualified for free/reduced lunch. Thus, the school served as an interesting foil for teachers at both Unity and Prestige. Unity teachers viewed Amapola High as the relatively privileged school in the district; Prestige teachers viewed it as a low-income, non-white school that one Prestige teacher said had been “ruined” by desegregation.

history of it and when you take in how it contrasts with the other areas of Amapola, like there's something really unique about it, and that bond, just being at Unity.

The unique bond among teachers and students at Unity was nurtured in multiple ways. Some had to do with school organization; block scheduling that included collaboration time created a sense of collegiality among teachers, and the school's participation in the California Partnership Academy program provided teachers with a shared sense of purpose. Administratively, the fairly recent reinvention process provided teachers with the sense that all Unity teachers were of high quality and had bought into the school. However, these were not the only factors contributing to a school culture that fostered teachers' positive identification with their school in the face of racialized stigma.

As Emilio suggested, the school was also embedded in a particular socio-historical context where local racial meanings were intertwined with particular understandings of class in the diverse but segregated city of Amapola. In the 1960s, African American and white parents at Unity HS worked together to mount a successful legal challenge to segregation within the district, creating a bond to civil rights in which teachers of all racial backgrounds could take pride. Additionally, when white flight followed desegregation, it was not the complete white flight from the city that occurred in Silverwood. Instead, middle and upper class parents exercised the option to send their students to private schools, an option not available to working class whites, who remained at Unity High School following desegregation. Working class whites could therefore fully identify as school insiders and experience some of the concentrated educational disadvantage that had been produced by richer whites' ability to enact structural racism. Thus, while the stigmatization of Unity and white flight from the school were both understood as the product of *racism*, the particular ways in which race and class were coupled at the local level allowed whites who remained at the school and shared a fate with students of color to identify as anti-racist insiders.

White teachers' ability to stand along teachers of color in opposing racism and working to create opportunities for their students was bolstered by a sense that the school's history was a living part of their current experience at Unity High School. Though the school's white student population at the time of my interviews was only a little over 2%, many alumni returned to teach at the school. These alumni were able to hearken back to an idealized time in the 1970s and '80s when the school was "very diverse," with African American, white, Asian American, and Latino students all attending the school. This created the possibility of inclusion for teachers and students of all races to count as true insiders. In addition, the visible presence of white teachers who were also alumni made it possible for all Unity teachers to vilify racist outsiders who stigmatized the school, while embracing white faculty as full insiders. This insider status is exemplified by the response of white alumna and current art teacher, Judy Barlow, to my question about how she built rapport with students:

It's always about representing... 'Cause I tell 'em, we're Cougars [school mascot]. We bleed red and gold [school colors]. I went through this - we are the underdogs. So that whole family commonality helps build the bonds.

Regardless of their individual racial backgrounds, teachers at Unity were able to participate in creating a collegial and defiantly proud school culture that identified positively with their school's racially stigmatized "underdog" status. In addition, although the teachers at Unity were united against a racial stigma they perceived from outside of the school, in their narratives, uniformity of racial makeup was not required to sustain this unity. Instead, teachers perceived their school as a dynamic place that could withstand and sustain historical change, and they took pride in the school's varied configurations of racial-ethnic and class diversity throughout its history.

This was especially evident in teachers' response to the recent shift from majority African American to majority Latino. Like many other schools in Los Angeles county, Unity High served a majority of African American students from the 1960s through the 1990s. However, following large-scale immigration to the region, the Latino population of these schools slowly increased during the 1980s and 1990s, and in the last decade, the population shifted from a large minority of Latino students to majority Latino. Catrina Paxton, a white English teacher at Unity, described the rapidity of this transition:

Just five years ago, the African American population was higher than the Latino population. And after just five years, the [ratio of Latinos to African Americans] is now like 65 to 32. It's just amazing. *So the current history is very dynamic, and who knows how it could end up.*

Although the demographic shift Catrina described occurred at many other schools, her final statement demonstrates an understanding of demographic change that was particular to Unity. Catrina was "amazed" by the population shift, but it also fit into a larger narrative of the school as a place where racial-ethnic composition was "dynamic" and where Unity teachers regarded their history of diversity with pride. Thus, African American career teacher and Unity alumna Yvonne Starr said:

My mother went to Unity. The school dynamics reflect the community dynamics in a major way. I love to hear my mom tell the stories of when she was young. It was more diverse – there was a very strong Japanese population. Times have changed. Things have shifted. *The shift that we're seeing now is for right now.*

Within a context that was understood as dynamic, teachers at Unity High School presented their work as socially important because they were serving students who were economically disadvantaged and who experienced racial discrimination. The particular racial makeup was not as important as the ability to serve this particular *type* of students and their corresponding needs. For example, Vernon Griffith was a 70 year-old African American teacher who entered teaching late in life, only 12 years earlier, because of his desire to act as an African American male role model. As he told me about this desire, however, he told me that he was not only role modeling to his African American students, but that his job was to talk to young men about the value of education:

These are the kinds of conversations that African American males must have with our young males. And then with my Latinos, or brown – I don't care who. It's colorless when it comes to a lack of maturity, when it comes to what we represent as teachers to our students.

Vernon told me that with his students at Unity High, he was able to openly engage students in discussion about the achievement gap in his classroom. Likewise,



white English teacher Nicole Slater was careful to supplement the textbook with culturally relevant material, including stories told from racially diverse voices. Beyond multicultural curriculum, however, she also did not shy away from explicit discussions of race and racism with her class, bringing in a story of a recent trial and asking her students whether they thought the verdict would have been the same if the defendant had not been white. The particular history of Unity High School, and the faculty culture that openly confronted racism through an inclusive lens of who might claim the status of an anti-racist insider, allowed teachers to openly address the shared challenges confronting African American and Latino students who lived in the same community and attended the same schools.

Ultimately, teachers took pride in their ability to confront the stigmatization that came from outside the high school and to provide their low-income, African American and Latino students with cohesive moral support. Like many other teachers at Unity, Yvonne Starr identified her students' biggest challenge as the community's negative perception of her students based on their race, class, and neighborhood because "it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy." She believed her job as a teacher was to help students fight that perception and believe in their own capabilities by fully acknowledging their personhood. When I asked Yvonne to tell me Unity's greatest strengths, she responded:

Our pride. School pride, our tradition, and our resilience... Their awareness of their greatness as students I think is a strength. As a staff, I think ours is that we understand how to support them as students. We come together as a staff and are generally consistent in what we say and do. For them to have that environment is huge. I don't think that's true of every high school.

### **Bunker: The Wild West**

Teachers at Bunker High School were made aware of their school's history of white flight when they first entered the hallways of the main school building. Adorned with pictures of successful alumni, the hallway displayed a stark contrast between the pictures of white men and women from classes through the 1950s and the pictures of African Americans, and later Latinos as well, that followed. Teachers noted that a number of white graduates still attended alumni events and took pride in the school, and observed the race and class differences between these older graduates and the student body of today. A number of teachers used the term "white flight" in describing the school's history, and all were aware that a dramatic demographic shift had taken place.

Even before developing this historical awareness, however, teachers entered their work at Bunker High School with a strong sense of how outsiders perceived the community of Silverwood. Silverwood was infamous throughout the country for its gang culture of the '80s and '90s and was the hometown of well-known rap artists. When they told acquaintances they worked in the school, Bunker teachers were met with reactions of "shock and disbelief." Teachers were often asked questions they found offensive, such as: "Are you like the teacher from Freedom Writers? [a movie about a white, female teacher who inspires low-income youth of color in a community depicted as violent]; "Are there metal detectors in the front office?"; "Do you wear a bulletproof vest?"; and "Are there shootings?" In response to these questions, Latina Spanish teacher Celia Whitten described her defensive posture:

You always have to defend yourself almost. And your kids. But I thought that once – before I started. Like, ‘Oh my god, I’m going to teach in Silverwood. How scary!’ I mean, most people associate our school with a negative connotation. But I tell ‘em, it’s awesome. It’s like any other school. We have great kids doing great things, except you don’t hear it because it’s good news. You only hear the bad news. And yeah, we do have bad news. There are shootings, yes there are. There are gangs. But there are also amazing things happening. But it’s too boring to hear about things like that.

In conversations with outsiders, Bunker teachers were quick to defend their school from its violent reputation and especially to defend their students. Throughout my interviews with Bunker teachers, I noticed that even as they criticized their school, they were careful to add the caveat that they were not referring to their students, whom they appreciated. However, in defending their students from the stigmatized reputation of Silverwood, teachers at Bunker were not able to draw upon a collective narrative of pride in their school’s underdog status. Due to the fragmented faculty culture that these teachers faced, they were unable to create relational trust among school actors. Instead the *mistrust* teachers felt towards each other, and the resultant shame they felt in their work, at times took on a racialized tone.

Though Bunker teachers tried to defend the value of their work in the Silverwood community, in our interviews, they often expressed feelings of shame, sadness, anger, and frustration about their work. For example, when I called Sarah Hart on the phone following a referral from another teacher, she vehemently declared that she was very busy but would agree to meet with me only because “someone needs to tell you what a fucked up place Bunker High School is.” Sarah was a white, 29 year-old chemistry teacher at Bunker High School who had previously worked as a science specialist at the district level, providing curricular support to middle and high school science teachers. Despite a lifelong love of science teaching that began with a high school job at a local aquarium and despite her current enrollment in an Ed.D. program, when we met in person, Sarah shared that she was so burnt out at Bunker High School that she was applying to retail management jobs and planned a leave from her doctoral studies. When I asked her how working at Bunker compared to her previous teaching experiences, Sarah responded:

It’s the worst experience I’ve ever had in my life. I’m embarrassed. I’m embarrassed. I mean, I now know why our kids are illiterate. On the first day of school every year, I announce “I am your chemistry teacher, if I were you, I’d apply to any school that you can get into. Tell your parents you want to go to private school. If you are hoping to be educated this year, apply anywhere and get out of here. ‘Cause they have no chance of being successful if they graduate from Bunker high. None. I have never seen an institution as ridiculous at this. I’m ashamed and embarrassed.

Though Sarah strongly asserted that she wanted me to interview her so that I could understand the “truth” about Bunker High, she was not the only teacher to express shame in her school, which she said was driving her away from the teaching profession. Her colleague in the science department, Hakima Green, self-identified as African and was the daughter of two Black American professionals who were active in the civil rights

movement. Her desire to teach was rooted in family tradition and her belief that education was central to African American culture. Though she recounted happy times at another high school in the city of Bunker where strong bonds were shared among African American teachers and between teachers and their students in the 1990s, Hakima's description of her experience at Bunker HS was marked by exhaustion and bitterness. Hakima was seeking other jobs, and was considering early retirement. Much of our interview focused on strategies she used to preserve her emotional health, such as taking trips, attending art shows, and doing yoga. At the end of our interview, Hakima poignantly explained:

Until a couple of years ago, I used to really like teaching. [*chokes up*] I've gotten jaded and bitter – I'm about to tear up because it is really, it's just nasty. I don't even know how to - I am going to explain it to you so you can understand... I used to really love teaching high school. You know, it used to be my pride and my joy, helping kids... but it's such a – to me – a negative, toxic environment and there's so much backstabbing and carpet being pulled out from under you.

Teachers' shame in their work at Bunker HS was clearly related to the school's dysfunctional administrative structure, where, in the view of teachers, cronyism prevailed over fairness. Their shame was also related to the lack of formal opportunities for communication and collaboration among teachers, which fostered mistrust among colleagues. White English teacher Edward Shaw described this teaching environment succinctly as he explained why he could not trust the school bells to ring on time:

It's whenever the drunk secretary in the office is like, 'Is it time? I don't know.' [*Imitates the bell noise*]. Like, seriously. That's reality. So, it's fucking anarchy. It's like the Wild West. There's no law except for the one that we make up.

The mistrust created by this fragmented and dysfunctional institutional environment was a major contributor to teachers' shame in their school; however, the shame and mistrust that teachers expressed in our interviews also had a strong racialized component which illustrates how the particular racial-ethnic and class dynamics of Silverwood were interwoven with the faculty culture at Bunker, hampering teachers' ability to coalesce around their shared desire to defend their students. In Amapola, white flight from public schools was class-stratified, with working class and poor whites remaining at Unity while their wealthier counterparts fled. In Silverwood, residential white flight from the community began with violent opposition to African American homebuyers and ended in rapid and complete abandonment of the city by all whites. Before the rapid decline of the manufacturing industry in Los Angeles, Silverwood was celebrated for the success of its middle class African American politicians; however, with the advancement of extreme poverty in the suburban city, Silverwood became infamously associated with drugs, gang violence, and disorder, and regional newspapers lambasted its politics as corrupt. These historical factors created a tense, racialized environment in which white school actors were suspected of being racially hostile outsiders and African American school actors were suspected of being corrupt and dysfunctional insiders.

Thus, in discussing the racial climate among teachers, many of my Bunker respondents expressed the suspicion that teachers from other racial groups were working

together to gain advantage with the school administration. In her interview, Hakima Green also told me that:

My understanding, from a highly reliable informant, is that the white teachers and the Mexican teachers have decided that they are going to band together to basically take over the school. And so I think that Black teachers are going to feel increasingly marginalized because of that coalition.

Conversely, white science teacher Marilee Matthews described feeling that despite earning an administrative credential, her race created a glass ceiling for her career growth in Bunker. She said, "I saw a lot of Black people being hired in the leadership positions but not very many white people, and I've heard that from lots of people." Likewise, Sarah Hart, the chemistry teacher who told her students to "apply anywhere and get out of here," complained:

The other teachers do not like me because I'm white. A lot of them were raised in Black-only homes and therefore 'the whites are the devils' and 'we don't like whites.' It's very racial. I've never experienced such racial discrimination as I have in Bunker. For everything. They refer to me as 'the little white girl.'

The racialized suspicion that some Bunker teachers felt was not only directed at teachers of other racial-ethnic backgrounds, but also, on occasion, at teachers' co-ethnics. For example, African American math teacher Jason Trice was a proud graduate of a majority African American high school with "political, powerful" teachers. Jason was deeply committed to his students, investing substantial time and money in their education and their family situations. However, when it came to describing the decline of the school's physical plant, Jason reacted with disgust that was intricately tied with race. He told me, "the white man gave us a gift. Bunker was - if there was such thing as a five star - it was an amazing place" before going on to describe the schools original amenities. Jason then used a racial slur to describe the attitude of corrupt and irresponsible city officials who he believed led to the destruction of these amenities. He continued, "I talk about my people real bad. We got control and tore the damn thing up. Now it's just a shell of its former self. And it's sad."

Whereas racial shame entered Jason Trice's discussion of the failures of school board members as corrupt district insiders, the following example from white English teacher Edward Shaw illustrates the shame that might come from being associated with whites who were not respectful of their status as potentially hostile racial outsiders. During our interview, Edward described himself as taking a consciously anti-racist approach in his work with students and as thinking reflexively about his whiteness and his masculinity in relation to the school. In discussing whiteness, he reported that teachers of color at Bunker had good reason to be suspicious of white teachers and that he shared this suspicion. He then told the story of an encounter with a new white teacher:

Introductions were made and he was the new history teacher - and the next time I saw him, this was in 2008, the election year, and he had a giant button on... And it had Obama on it, and it said, 'He's Black and I'm Proud.' And right there I was like, 'Fuck you for good. Leave. Go away.' And I didn't say hello to him for a year.

In Edward's view, the white teacher wearing a pin stating "He's Black and I'm Proud" was worthy of contempt because that teacher willfully chose to ignore the insider/outsider dynamics at play within Bunker HS as a racialized space. This transgression was so shameful that it led Edward to shun his white colleague. In this way, the racial shame fostered by a fragmented school culture engendered further isolation and hostility among teachers.

This racialized mistrust among teachers had consequences for students in terms of how faculty confronted racial-ethnic change in their school population. Unlike Unity HS, where teachers spoke of African American and Latino students as facing similar challenges due to racism and a shared class position, some teachers at Bunker developed distinct typologies of "African American" and "Latino" students to explain perceived behavioral problems in their classroom. For example, African American science teacher Hakima Green stated, "a lot of times Latino boys are very disrespectful to me. Latinas are also sometimes rude and just very talkative." Other teachers provided slightly different racialized views. Echoing the conflation of the perceived "bad" behavior of African American children with beliefs about family and upbringing noted by Ann Ferguson (2000), white science teacher Marilee Matthews said:

In Silverwood, the Hispanic culture is very respectful for teachers. For my Black experience, half of the Black students were very disrespectful and in your face. And the other half were reserved and even professional. What I have figured out is [that] the ones that are well-behaved Black kids have dads. My own personal observations.

It should be noted that this categorizing of student behaviors based on racial-ethnicity was not typical of my Bunker interviews; however, it was a phenomenon that emerged in Bunker interviews but not at Unity precisely because the former school was so fragmented and lacked a common discourse to articulate issues related to racial-ethnicity and class. These racialized typologies developed by some individual teachers were also connected to a larger problem: the inability of the faculty and administration to respond positively to the growing Latino population.

Bunker teachers' descriptions of demographic change largely focused on the perceived inability of district administrators to serve the particular needs of Latino students and parents. Teachers complained about the lack of Latinos in positions of authority in the school and district, harsher discipline assigned to Latino students, and a lack of staff able to provide Spanish language assistance. When I asked Celia Whitten about racial tension at the school, she said, "the crazy thing is, I think it's more visible with the adults than with the kids." Following up on this, she explained:

I can see some resentments. Like for example, when we have Black History Month, especially because all of our administration is Black... I always tell the [Latino] kids, you need to embrace it [Black History Month]. You live in the community... But when it comes to Hispanic celebrations, [administrators] never want to do anything. And I'm like, you cannot do that. You have to represent equally.

For all students and families, whether Latino, African American, or some other racial-ethnic background, the racially charged faculty culture of mistrust harmed their chances of finding a cohesive network of support at school. This was highlighted by white science teacher Charis Doran, who told me that Latino parents' concerns are "swept under

the rug” in the district, and then added, “I’ve had some African American parents, too, that wanted things to change at the school but really didn’t know how to go about doing it.” Though low-income students of color and their parents articulated their need for equal representation that bolstered community pride and improved educational resources, both the administrative structure and faculty culture of Bunker High appeared inadequate to address these needs. Rather than working cohesively on behalf of their students, Bunker teachers wound up fighting individual, sometimes racialized, battles in the Wild West.

### **Prestige – Salt Lake City in Southern California**

The relationship between privilege at Prestige High School and a history in which the city of Juniper broke from its neighbors to form an affluent white enclave largely went unspoken in my interviews with Prestige teachers. Although these teachers readily referred to the wealth of the district, they were less likely to discuss privilege as it related to racial-ethnicity. One important exception to this rule came from George Reedy, a white special education teacher who lived in the nearby city of Amapola, in walking distance of Unity High School. George had primarily worked in non-public<sup>23</sup> schools for severely emotionally disturbed youth before moving to Prestige, as we discussed early in our interview:

Jessica: What was it like, making that transition from a non-public population to Prestige?

George: There were several kind of dramatic things culturally. One is, there’s a lot of white people around here. [In Amapola], there isn’t. And of course this is a very wealthy community, so you can just see that. I thought I was in Utah. I had never, in all the years I’d [lived in Amapola], I’d never really come over and looked at Juniper. But in preparation for the move, we did come over, and I really thought I was in freakin’ Salt Lake City... It was a more comfortable, safer environment, but I was a fish out of water for a while.

Jessica: In what ways did you feel like a fish out of water?

George: I had no idea there was this wealthy white community next door. And the parents are very involved in school. There is a significant political climate that you have to learn about and master. And I’d never had that anywhere I’d taught.

George’s description of Juniper as “freakin’ Salt Lake City” captures a number of important aspects of privilege at Prestige High School. First, given the diversity of Los Angeles and the city’s close proximity to Amapola, George found it anomalous that whites were concentrated in the city of Juniper. Second, wealth and whiteness were intertwined in Juniper, producing an environment where teachers could feel “safer” and appreciate parental involvement (though this involvement also created a difficult “political climate,” as described in Chapter 3). Third, despite the initial shock caused by the highly visible racial difference between Juniper and Amapola, white privilege created

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<sup>23</sup> Non-public, non-sectarian schools are privately operated schools that serve students with special needs not met by public schools and are therefore eligible for per-pupil public funding. The schools where George Reedy worked were operated by non-profits in Amapola that also ran group homes and provided other supports for foster children.

an environment that was “comfortable” to Prestige teachers, an environment where racial stigma from outsiders did not weigh on teachers’ emotions.

The lack of stigma felt by teachers at Prestige can be read from their responses to my question about the history of the school. These narratives generally rendered invisible the role of white flight in producing the school. Many responses to this question ignored the school’s origins altogether. Instead, teachers referred to changes in the structure of courses, spaces allowed for teacher collaboration, and the school’s increase in academic rank. Teachers were also concerned with the shrinking population in the district when they described their school’s history, reporting on the integration of the junior high and high school and the recent closure of one of the elementary schools in the district.

Some teachers did raise the school’s historical connection to Unity High School, but most did so in race-neutral terms that elided the cause of the split. For example:

Originally..., Prestige students were all at Unity. Not sure when that opened up here.

Another teacher said:

Prestige formed in [year]. Before that, the students in Prestige went to Unity high school, and in the early 60s..., we became a separate district.

Two Prestige teachers went further in implicitly referring to white flight as they described the school’s history. One of these teachers had previously worked at Amapola High School and learned about the history there; the other had grown up in the area and received her master’s in teaching from an “urban education” program with a strong social justice focus. However, even these teachers used a language of “bussing” and “desegregation” that implied a racist backlash but did not explicitly refer to racism or the racial-ethnic characteristics of the schools.<sup>24</sup> Each teacher also used equivocal language to present this history rather in contrast to the strong assertions of racism made by Unity teachers. For example, the latter of these two teachers, white English teacher Claire Unger, told me:

I heard that once the desegregation law came through, everybody was going to Unity and then [Prestige parents] decided to form their own school. So I think in the 60s was when it opened up, [*sarcastically*] which is kind of a nice coincidence, but I think that’s our history.

Similarly, Will Armor, a white history teacher said:

[I’ve heard that] when they started bussing the kids in the Amapola school district, the [Prestige] community just said no, we’re going to have our own district and avoid that. Now, I don’t know how true that is. It does sort of make sense to me in the sense of the way that the culture is around here. It’s very much a public school that the community has said ‘we’re going to make this as much like a private school as possible.’ ‘Cause they

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<sup>24</sup> These explanations are historically inaccurate. Prestige was not formed in response to “busing” or “desegregation” in Amapola, which occurred a decade later. Instead, Prestige was formed in response to the growing African American population at Community High, which was close to 40% in the early 1960s. It is possible that “busing” appeared as a more acceptable – or at least less racially explicit – stimulus for the creation of a white enclave school.

dump funding into it like you wouldn't believe to make it as good a district as they possibly can.

Although racism and white privilege went unspoken in teachers' narratives of their work, teachers referred to class more readily in our interviews, as Will did when he referred to parents' desire to make Prestige "as much like a private school as possible." Teachers readily acknowledged that Juniper was a "wealthy district" where parents were highly educated. In some of my interviews, teachers said they felt uncomfortable with student's wealth, referring to disparities between the types of cars seen in the students' parking lot and those seen in the teachers' parking lot. A few teachers also described incidents where students flaunted their wealth, or, if they had children of their own enrolled in the school, noted family difficulties in keeping up with their peers' consumption. More often, however, teachers referred to local wealth without shame because it helped make Prestige a "good school."

While white privilege was largely rendered invisible in teachers' narratives, wealth was discussed more openly as a *legitimate* explanation for the differences between Prestige and other schools. For example, white Spanish teacher Forest Lasky described the resource differences between Prestige and other schools in the following exchange:

Jessica: What would you say are the school's greatest strengths?

Forest: The motivation of the parents. Their desire to see their kids do as well as they do economically. People in Silverwood might complain, "Look at people in Juniper, they have this and that." Well, yes they do. They are in the position where they can afford to give the \$2500 and that does help the school, but that aside, just looking at the elementary schools, there is so much parental involvement. We have parents who are making a good income so one of the parents doesn't have to work so they come and they donate their time to the school. They come and read after lunch or they come and help in the classroom. There's always parents involved in this community.

Forest responded to the imagined complaint that inequality between Bunker HS and Prestige HS was unfair by referring first to the wealth of parents as an explanation for differences between the schools and then tying parents' wealth to their commitment to the school. Likewise, white history teacher Lyle Pomeroy described Juniper as a "great community with parents who care" and as:

A pretty affluent community. The average home price is really high..., so a lot of highly educated parents send their kids there. We have parents who are lawyers, who are doctors, who are scientists... It shows in our test scores. We do really well. The parents are really motivated; they really care. When I teach history, if I talk about the Renaissance, for example, it's nice that four or five students or even more have been to Italy. That gives them background knowledge that maybe you wouldn't have in other districts.

Whereas racial-ethnic comparisons may have been more problematic for teachers, discussing the excellence of Prestige HS in terms of parent wealth and education allowed teachers like Lyle and Forest to construct school success as accruing to the achievements of parents and to parental "care." By eliding white privilege in favor of explanations for



Prestige's success based solely on class advantages, teachers were able to take pride in their work teaching students with significant economic and cultural capital.

Despite this de-coupling of race from class in Prestige teachers' interviews, it should not be presumed that Juniper residents did not *experience* white privilege or that the school was unmarked by racial animus. Although most teachers quickly responded to my question about racial tension among students by saying the school had no problems with race, some interviewees slowly recalled overtly racist incidents throughout our conversations. These included racist teasing of Muslim and presumed-Muslim students, a swastika drawn on the walls of a Jewish teachers' classroom, and racial slurs painted on the window and door of a Korean teacher's classroom in the wake of the shooting incident at Virginia Tech. In general, teachers said that racial comments occurred in the form of joking, rather than these more disturbing incidents, which were rare. However, both jokes and larger incidents indicated that Prestige students were indeed aware of racial difference in their midst. In addition, students seemed to be aware of racial-ethnic and class differences between Juniper and nearby Amapola. Will Armor, the history teacher who taught at Amapola High School before transitioning to Prestige, told me that:

When you arrive at Prestige and people know you came from AHS, there's a certain – kids here are pretty sheltered and they have a belief of what AHS is, so when you show up and they're like 'ooh, you were at AHS,' discipline is not a problem at all 'cause you have a certain street cred.

Will went on to tell the story of a basketball tournament that took place at Amapola High School. The Prestige players kept to themselves in the stands, not talking to the other teams out of discomfort. When Will entered the gym and high-fived and hugged his old Amapola students, the Prestige players were shocked and impressed, saying "Whoah. Did you see that?" Though again, Will did not explicitly refer to race or ethnicity in the story, students' fearful discomfort and his use of the term "street cred," coupled with Amapola High School's demographics, indicate that Prestige students held racialized and classed stereotypes about students in a school only a few miles from their homes.

In highlighting Prestige teachers' ability to obscure white privilege in favor of class advantage, my research revisits scholarly work suggesting that white privilege may be "invisible" to many white Americans (McIntosh 1992; Brown, Carnoy et al. 2003). However, in line with empirical research suggesting that white identity is indeed salient for most white people (Hartmann, Gerteis et al. 2009), I note that Prestige teachers were aware of racial difference within their school and across local public schools. However, these teachers were able to *discursively render invisible* the privileges that accrued to Juniper residents as the result of a history of white flight. Leaving racism unspoken while acknowledging the class advantages of students (but not so much as to override individual effort and merit-based achievement) was an option that allowed teachers to affirm pride in their school as legitimate and unrelated to ongoing dynamics of racial inequality.

Teachers' privilege to use a discourse of earned class status to render white privilege invisible likely resulted in negative consequences for students of color at Prestige. In our interviews, teachers recognized that race and racism may have been a source of discomfort for some students, but in many cases, the teachers seemed unsure of

how to address the issue. This was because racism at Prestige took the form of joking based around normative whiteness, rather than overt hostility. As white English teacher Claire Unger stated, “It comes across mostly as humor. That’s kind of the deadly form because it’s not taken seriously but it seems like it’s meant in a really derogatory sense.” Though many teachers were unsure of whether to regulate this behavior, Korean teacher Jin Lee was clear that racist teasing hurt Korean students’ sense of identity. She said:

I’ve had a few students who come back [after taking her course] and say that they are so proud to be Korean. But a lot of times they want to be... bananas – that’s what they call it – outside is yellow but inside is white.

The normatively white space of Prestige had a negative effect on other racial-ethnic minority students as well. For example, to promote diversity for multicultural week, teacher Marci Wick had her students do an exercise in which they anonymously submitted statements combining a group and an individual identifier, such as “I am Asian American and I am \_\_\_\_\_” or “I am LGBTQ and I am \_\_\_\_\_.” Meant to challenge stereotypes, the exercise encouraged students to describe something about themselves that might defy expectations. Though Marci described this exercise to illustrate how a few students took advantage of their anonymity to write overtly racist statements, more telling are the examples she provided of statements written by her Mexican American students:

It was probably one of the most insightful things, especially the kids that were from Mexico, the things that they put. It just broke my heart, things like, ‘I’m Mexican, but my Dad’s not a gardener,’ ‘I’m Mexican, but my parents pay their taxes.’ And it just really brought to heart the things that are said.

Although Marci was able to gain this insight into the discrimination her Latino students faced in the context of Prestige, elsewhere in the interview she also expressed bafflement at Latino students who passed notes to each other saying “join the Brown club.” This bafflement was produced by the invisibility of white privilege at Prestige, where teachers like Gene Buckland could say “Black people are usually, believe this or not, welcomed with open arms. I see a Black - alright!” This statement contrasted to Will Armor’s discussion of how African American students understood normative whiteness at Prestige. Will, a white teacher who was advisor to the Black Student Union, told me that in his students’ experience, they confronted overt racism far less often than uncomfortable joking and a sense that white peers “don’t get it.” He said:

Usually what happens at Prestige is that kids don’t realize how serious that issue [racism] is because they don’t see it. They’re sheltered... ‘What? We have a Black president. Racism’s a thing of the past. That’s Chapter 21.’ A lot of the time they make jokes not realizing how bad they are. As we’ve gotten more African American or Hispanic students at the school, they’re still one or two or three in a room, so it’s rare they’ll step up and say “that’s not okay.” I wouldn’t either. ‘Cause there’s really no backing at all.

At Prestige, students who disrupted the normative whiteness of the school space were subjected to regulation from their peers through racialized jokes and racist teasing. Their experience of racism was obscured by a “sheltered” environment. Thanks to a school culture focused on individual achievement wherein teachers ignored white

privilege and celebrated class advantage, most teachers at Prestige were uncertain about whether or how to intercede on behalf of students of color who might feel marginalized.

Although a few Prestige teachers noted that the school environment could be hostile to students of color – including Asian American students – the common discourse teachers used to describe demographic change glossed over this hostility. Couched in the language of legitimate advantage, teachers described the growth of the Asian American minority population as a boon to the school because it shifted the campus culture toward academic achievement. When I asked about changes in the school over time, Prestige teachers described the growth of the Asian American population in the 1980s as stimulating white parents' desire to see their students achieve top grades in advanced courses. As white math teacher Gene Buckland put it, "the Asian kids have upped the ante and now the non-Asian kids are trying to do that too." According to Gene, the competition resulting from this demographic shift not only altered the school's trajectory toward becoming the "number two school" in the state in terms of test scores, but also influenced the actions of white parents in the present:

The white parents, in my opinion, are trying to push so they can get that extra edge, get that grade up. Because they truly believe that the work ethic my son or daughter's doing – I've got to compete against that Asian to get into that good college. Because if these Asians are getting 'A's and my kids are only getting 'B's, how am I going to compete?

Teachers at Prestige High School generally understood the demographic transition of their school in terms of benefits accruing to white students. The gradual inclusion of Asian American students "raised the bar" for white families in Juniper, improving their chances of getting into top colleges and increasing parents' investments in the school as an "academic powerhouse." Left out of these historical narratives were the feelings of Asian American students as they tried to fit into the environment of "Salt Lake City in Southern California." Even in the absence of direct discussion of Juniper as a wealthy white enclave, the white privilege to maintain access to educational advantage was omnipresent in my interviews with teachers at Prestige High.

## **Conclusion**

The influence of local school contexts on teachers' shared discourse of racial ethnicity and class have important implications for the reproduction of inequality. Since the 1986 publication of "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of 'Acting White,'" by Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu, significant concern has been raised in and outside of academic circles about strengthening historically disadvantaged students' positive identification with school. Until now, much of the literature has placed the onus for sustaining these positive school connections directly on teachers. Substantial quantitative (Alexander, Entwistle et al. 1987; Oates 2003; Downey 2004) and qualitative research (Casteel 1998; Lynn, Bacon et al. 2010) has indicated that white, middle class teachers tend to harshly judge their African American pupils, creating negative psycho-social outcomes for these children. Other authors have suggested that teachers of color may validate co-ethnic students' social and cultural realities in school (Quiocho and Rios 2000; Lynn 2006). More specifically, Prudence Carter (2005) argued that non-white students need relationships with teachers of color who act as "multicultural brokers" by demonstrating adept movement across socio-cultural settings.

While teacher background characteristics, especially with regard to race and class,

certainly influence whether low-income students of color can identify with school, these factors are not strict determinants; some white teachers are able to promote these students' school success, while some teachers of color fail to do so (MacLeod 1987; Tyson 2003). Scholars advocating for "culturally relevant" pedagogy suggest that with time and personal reflection, teachers of various backgrounds can learn to create caring relationships with students of color (Gay 2000; Darling-Hammond 2004). Although scholars in this vein have called for greater attention to the influence of context on the development of culturally relevant practices (Buehler, Gere et al. 2009), this literature remains focused on teachers at the individual level, rather than attending to the ways in which schools may organize racial meanings and constrain interactions between students and teachers.

In this chapter, I move away from a narrow focus on individual teacher characteristics to examine schools as organizational contexts for *teachers'* identification with (or distancing from) their school and students. I have looked into schools as organizational contexts for teachers' pride and shame in two ways. First, I have drawn upon the discussion of faculty culture in the previous chapter to explore the terms on which teachers have developed a sense of belonging as coworkers. Second, I have explored how conditions of quarantined disadvantage interacted with these faculty cultures to produce particular systems of meaning-making around racial ethnicity and class.

While some previous studies have suggested that faculty culture might influence teachers' treatment of low-income and racial-ethnic minority students, these have typically focused on teachers who legitimize the degradation of these students (Becker 1952; Anyon 1997; McLaren 1999; Ferguson 2000). In one important exception, Mary Haywood Metz (1983) found that students and teachers of different races at a diverse urban magnet school demonstrated remarkably positive relationships. She attributed this partly to features of school organization and partly to a faculty culture that made teachers more accepting of minority and low-income students, even when they engaged in behaviors that attracted disapproval from outside culture.

Looking back at the previous chapter, teacher collegiality and a well-functioning administrative structure in which teachers feel professionally empowered appear to be important elements in developing a constructive and supportive faculty culture, as documented in my own empirical research and in the previous literature. However, these factors alone may not allow teachers to positively identify with their Black and Latino students, especially as these students are stigmatized by outside culture and as teachers enter their careers with pre-existing racial understandings. Local social and historical contexts can shape the available meanings that attach to racial categories (McDermott 2006), meanings that teachers draw upon in constructing their faculty culture. Indeed, local understandings of racial-ethnicity and class have been shown to influence teachers' interactions with their students in other contexts as well; Edward Morris (2005) showed that white and Black teachers' different understandings of white flight from the area surrounding a middle school in Texas influenced whether they perceived white students as "middle class" or "trailer trash."

At Bunker, Unity, and Prestige High Schools, the faculty cultures were intertwined with local perceptions of racial-ethnicity and class. In three schools where class disadvantage was quarantined among racial-ethnic minority students (and,

conversely, preserved class advantages for privileged white students) class and race were not necessarily conflated but rather played off of each other in interesting ways depending upon the specific history and social context of each school. Unity High School teachers developed a unified discourse of collective pride to grapple with outsiders' stigmatization of the school as the "Black and Mexican sheep." Teachers of all races were able to identify as proud, anti-racist "underdogs" within a city where white flight had been stratified by class. In contrast, Bunker's faculty culture was characterized by mistrust in a school that teachers perceived as a "chaotic" Wild West. This mistrust often extended to a *racialized* mistrust of other teachers in a context where the racial animus of whites had been a long-standing source of community disadvantage and where African Americans with local power were suspected of being corrupt. Finally, white privilege was rendered invisible at Prestige even as the suburb stood out as a "Salt Lake City in California." Instead, teachers took pride in their students' school achievement and in the school's numerous advantages by celebrating the privileges that accrued to wealthy families.

The different approaches to racial-ethnicity and class within the faculty culture of each school had distinct implications for racial-ethnic minority students. At Prestige High School, teachers tended to frame the demographic transition towards including a large Asian American minority in terms of advantages to white students, ignoring the particular needs of this ethnic minority population. In addition, because teachers discursively rendered whiteness invisible, they also tended to ignore racism at their school and the challenges faced by racial-ethnic minority students. At Bunker High School, teachers' infighting and racialized mistrust reduced teachers' ability to develop a cohesive ethic to envision mobility and social justice for their low-income, racial-ethnic minority students. Rather than embracing the rapidly growing Latino population at the school, demographic change acted as a new source of resentment and mistrust among many teachers. In both of these schools, the faculty culture was out of step with the needs of racial-ethnic minority students; as argued by Geneva Gay (2000:223), "when the cultures of students and teachers are not synchronized, someone loses out. Invariably, it is the students."

Given the growing youth population of racial-ethnic minorities in the US, there is a "demographic imperative" for US public schools to meet the educational needs of students of color, and to build school structures that embrace rather than alienate historically marginalized student populations (Buehler, Gere, Dallavis, and Haviland 2009). The examples of Prestige and Bunker High School suggest that faculty culture can hinder teachers' ability to cultivate an active discourse of anti-racism and to create cultural connections with their students. However, faculty cultures also have the potential to benefit low-income students of color. At Unity High School, unique historical and local circumstances led to a faculty culture based around fighting local stigmatized perceptions of the school and cultivating familial relationships. These relationships allowed the African American, white, and Latino teachers I interviewed to identify as anti-racist educators who worked towards the goal of social mobility for all of their low-income students of color. To better meet the needs of youth who have historically been met by alienating school institutions, educators would do well to consider methods of fostering similarly collegial, anti-racist school cultures.

## Chapter 5

### Schools as Contexts for Care

In the introduction to this dissertation, I told the story of Unity High School teacher Judy Barlow, who said of teaching, “it’s not just a job. It’s a lifestyle.” When Judy made that comment, she was explaining the work she was doing at the moment – moving personal items out of her classroom during the summer so that some improvements could be made to the building. She explained to me that these sacrifices of her own and her family’s time (her son was helping her move) were part and parcel of the work of teaching. However, sacrifices like these were not without rewards. Later in the interview, when I asked Judy how being a teacher had affected her as a person, she replied:

I think being an educator has really transformed me to be more human. It’s taught me volumes about interaction and people... I feel very empowered because of it... So that’s a great thing. Because that allows me to help kids look at the future as something that can be really wonderful. And I can help you get there. Lets just do it together.

For Judy, teaching was an empowering, transformative experience. By looking through her students’ eyes and guiding them to see a positive future for themselves, Judy also looked toward her own future as she envisioned an ideal self that was ever *more human*. By investing in her students, Judy was also investing in the type of person she wanted to be. She was empowered to provide students with greater care through the emotional and relational work of caring.

In my interviews across all three high schools, “teaching” emerged not simply as a form of labor but also as an active project through which teachers could realize their personal ideals and reap emotional rewards. The extent to which teachers engaged in these projects varied greatly among individuals and across schools, but all teachers I spoke described their work as involving some component of care. That is, in the process of providing academic instruction, teachers had to meet student needs that were often intellectual, but also extended into needs for personal recognition, emotional support, or even physical sustenance. Indeed, many teachers seemed to evaluate the quality of their work and the rewards they received not from academic outcomes but rather through qualitative measures of their students’ social, moral, and emotional development.

To reap the psychic rewards of student growth, teachers made investments of money, time, emotions, and self to cultivate caring relationships with their students. Teachers in all three schools made investments that should be highlighted as demonstrating important sacrifices made in the process of “public school teaching.” These sacrifices by teachers in varied school settings show that the role of “teacher” is intertwined with the activity of care. However, the needs teachers saw in their students, the investments they made in caring for those needs, and the types of emotional selves they cultivated through this care varied greatly in relation to the school context. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which teachers used care to experience their work as meaningful and how the meanings that attached to this care were influenced by the distinct working environments of Bunker, Unity, and Prestige High Schools.

## Investing in Psychic/Intrinsic Rewards

There are many rewards to working as a public school teacher. Teachers often appreciate their jobs because they enjoy the subject area they teach, because they prefer to work on a school schedule, and because it pays a middle class salary. However, the primary reward teachers articulated throughout my interviews came from the *subjective value* they assigned to working with young students. This value could be broken down into three fundamental components: (1) the joy of immersing one's self in youthful energy; (2) the moral meaning of developing relationships with students; and (3) the social meaning of influencing young people.

Regarding the first component, teachers reported loving their jobs because it was fun and kept them feeling young. For example, Gene Buckland, a math teacher at Prestige High School, told me, "I enjoy these kids. And when they understand something, you get that big smile on their face. So for 9, 10 hours a day, I'm having fun. Not too many people can say they do that in their job." Along these same lines, Bunker English teacher Monica Baker shared that, "It's such an amazing thing that we do, to be around kids and to love what you do and to come home and not be tired." This was not to say that teaching was easy work; many teachers reported that there were days when they came home physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. However, teachers found that contact with children could provide them with an energy that buoyed them through this exhaustion. Even the challenges of working with young people were understood as presenting their own form of interpersonal rewards. Thus, Bunker math teacher Steve Alvarez said, "Something during the day is going to crack you up or depress you, but in a way that you feel like you're alive." Prestige special education teacher George Reedy also embraced the challenges in his work, saying:

You have to be on the ball. You cannot be unprepared. It makes me feel like I'm worthwhile. There is no way, especially working with LD [learning disabled] kids, that I can half-ass it. I've got to be absolutely prepared every day. So it gives me – *there's a certain vitality and energy that goes with it.*

George's motivation to enter work absolutely prepared every day related to the second important psychic reward of teachers' work, the moral importance they assigned to influencing the life trajectories of adolescent students. Later in the interview, George Reedy told me that on his deathbed, he wouldn't be counting his life in nickels, but in relationships, "and being a schoolteacher has increased just the number of relationships one thousand percent." As noted by R.W. Connell (1985), meaningful relationships were not a byproduct of teachers' work – instead, teachers used relationships to involve themselves in student development and to feel good about the moral and ethical importance of their every day actions.

Relationships with students were morally valuable because of the lessons that teachers learned. A number of teachers shared that caring for students taught them "patience" and made them more attuned to the feelings of others. Teachers spoke of becoming more compassionate, less selfish, and better listeners. For example, Monica Baker, an English teacher at Bunker said:

[Teaching] made me a different person. It taught me patience, taught me to not be so selfish. It taught me to learn from others. It's inspired me to

see some of these kids who are half my age doing amazing things and bouncing back from such awful things. It's humbling, in a way.

The emotional attachments teachers made to their students provided them with a sense of higher purpose that counterbalanced sacrifices such as not pursuing more prestigious or higher-paying careers. Emilio Landrum, a social science teacher at Unity, said:

I think [teaching has] just really given me just purpose and given me a sense of fulfillment... My girlfriend, she makes quite a bit more than me in retail. She's a store manager and she easily makes about 20 thousand more than me, but I'm okay with it because I know that I'm making a difference and you know, what I hear back from students or what I see in them more than makes up for it. So it definitely helps me feel more confident about who I am and the fact that I don't need a paycheck and I don't need status.

Often, teachers counterbalanced a desire for money or status with the moral meaning they drew from relationships with individual students. However, many teachers also connected this personal moral meaning (i.e., relationships mean more than money) to a *social good*, asserting that the work of teaching contributes to building a strong citizenry and a better future. In the particular cases of Bunker and Unity High, this social good involved an anti-racist and class justice component, where teachers asserted that they were helping low-income students of color defy the odds or improve their community. Teachers also made connections to social good at the larger level of citizenship. For example, Seth Daley described the social importance of developing relationships with young people after I asked him when he decided that he wanted to be a teacher. He responded that the Columbine incident affected him on a deep, visceral level and that it triggered a desire to teach. He said:

I started thinking about the two young men, and I was just like, how crazy is that? That they lived in this community of parents and teachers and nobody had a clue. Nobody pulled these kids aside at any point and said, 'Hey – I kind of notice you look like you want to bring destruction to everything around you.' You know what I mean?... Just to reach out to the kid.

Thus, for Seth, teachers could play the important social role of developing relationships with young people who might feel alienated and do harm. The social importance Seth assigned to teaching came in response to a specific incident, but most teachers assigned a broader social value to teaching that was well expressed by Vernon Griffith, an English teacher at Unity High School, who said:

Teaching keeps me in front of young, energetic brilliant young people. And not-so-brilliant. And everyday common kids who struggle with everyday issues. As a result, I'm a better person. A more wholesome person. When I see young children in front of me at school and in the neighborhood, I see our future. I see a wonderful potential that comes ahead.

Likewise, Marci Wick, a science teacher at Prestige reflected:

I think [teaching] gives me a lot of meaning to my life. It makes me realize that I can make a difference and that's important, so it gives me



value and I find my place in society. That I'm making a difference. Not every day, but hopefully long-term. So to me, it gives me purpose.

In order to realize the psychic rewards that came from relationships with students and to experience sense of joy and moral and social worth, many of the teachers I interviewed made substantial investments in their work. These investments involved teachers' time and money, but also fundamental aspects of the self, which teachers invested, in part, out of the wish to become a "better person." The comments of Alvin Walton, a math teacher at Unity, exemplify this stance:

[Teaching is] just who I am. I live it, I breathe it... Being a teacher, you want to be the best at it and you want to be a good example, so I guess it's made me feel more responsibility to get things right and to keep pushing myself to always be learning. I thought about if I did another kind of job..., I could see being a different kind of person where I'd just keep my job in one compartment and then use the rest of my life to just do what I like doing. With teaching, it's much more of a mission for me, where I don't draw that line as much between my life and my job. It's just, my job is part of my life... Because I don't really separate it when I go home. I'm always thinking about it.

Teachers like Alvin saw their work as a project of striving for self-improvement, but this improvement was not *selfish*, since it was undertaken for the benefit of others. To serve as a "good example" and to provide students with the best education possible, teachers felt that they must continue to grow both pedagogically and relationally. Alvin Walton speculated that in other types of jobs, he would not push himself in the same way because his work life and his personal life would be compartmentalized. That is, he imagined that if he were not a teacher, he would maintain a strong symbolic boundary between work and home. Varied kinds of workers seek to create such boundaries (Nippert-Eng 1995), but scholars have found that many care workers instead "take their work home" with them in the form of emotional attachments to their clients (Stone 2000).

Not all teachers invested their whole self in the way described by Alvin Walton, however. Each teacher I interviewed had a different way of negotiating the boundaries between "job" and "life" and in determining how much to invest in the psychic/intrinsic rewards of their work. For example, Gene Buckland, a math teacher at Prestige High School, joined others in distinguishing his work as a teacher from other types of work because of the rewards it brought. Gene said that he chose to be a teacher because of "that energy" that he receives from kids. However, Gene drew a firm boundary between his work life and home life, making sure not to share too much about himself with students. He also drew a firm, though jovial, boundary around students' ability to share with him, saying: "I tell the kids, 'You got problems? I don't deal with domestic issues.'"

Alvin and Gene represent the range of boundary-setting that teachers used to negotiate the balance between cultivating emotional rewards and limiting costly investments of the self. While each balance was struck on an individual basis – and likely shifted over time as well – importantly for this study, the investments teachers made in their work and the types of relationships they formed with students varied in systematic ways across the three school contexts. These variations were influenced by the types of needs teachers saw in their students and the social resources that were

available to teachers to provide care. In the next three sections, I will explore the kinds of investments teachers made in their students in each particular school and describe how these different investments resulted in different kinds of caring relationships across the three schools.

### **Bunker – Care in the Chaos**

It is widely accepted that teachers in underfunded schools make personal investments in classroom supplies; in fact, in 2009-2010, teachers invested an estimated \$1.3 billion dollars back into the schools where they worked (Nagel 2010). Teacher monetary expenditures have been found to vary widely across schools depending on local funding; this was the case for my study as well. Of the three schools I studied, teachers at Bunker reported the greatest material deficits, and most teachers supplemented these shortfalls with personal expenditures. When I asked English teacher Charis Doran how much she spent on teaching each year, she responded:

How much can you write off on your taxes? \$250 as a teacher? I'd say I would go through that before school even opened. Just with posters and extra things you have in your room in preparation for 'what if I can't get this?...' I need to be ready with my own stuff. But I would say over the school year, well over \$1000. Easily.

Charis' response reflects the general insecurity among Bunker teachers that I described in Chapter 3 as stemming from a dysfunctional and disorganized school culture where the protocol for accessing supplies and the availability of material resources was unclear. However, while teachers at Bunker reported "hoarding" supplies and hiding them from other teachers within a fragmented school culture, they also invested their own funds to provide their students with material resources. Bunker teachers gave me detailed accounts of their expenditures, which included regular purchases of paper, pencils, pens, whiteboard markers, flashdrives, crayons, folders, staples, and photocopies of supplemental readings. Teachers also made larger purchases such as dictionaries, class sets of textbooks, novels for a borrowing library, bookshelves, filing cabinets, and LCD projectors. Teachers also bought their own laptops, projectors, printers, and iPads to have the tools on hand they felt they needed to do a good job.

In addition to these monetary investments in instructional materials, teachers were concerned that their students had personal material needs that were not met at home or at school. This led teachers to supply students with food, clothing, and money for transportation. For example, science teacher Sarah Hart shared that she brought sweatshirts in her car to give to students when it was raining, and math teacher Jason Trice kept fruit in his classroom to feed students when they were hungry and kept dollar bills in his wallet so that he could pay students who did classroom chores. Likewise, English teacher Russell Pratt told me that he never refused a student who asked for bus fare or lunch money, or who sold candy at school to earn money because "I feel like it's a little thing, but if it helps them eat, I can't say no."

Teachers' concern for their students physical, emotional, and academic wellbeing also led them to give of their time. Many teachers kept their doors open during lunch periods to chat with students about school or personal problems and stayed after school to provide tutoring and homework help. Teachers invested personal time overseeing club activities on the weekends, like Monica Baker who took the Gay-Straight Alliance to a queer film festival and to a gay prom or Celia Whitten who took Green Club students on

monthly beach clean-ups. Teachers like Victoria Scott also took students on field trips during and outside of school hours to cultural events, museums, and plays because “not all learning has to happen in the classroom and if they discover something great going someplace, then I’m fine with that. It’s great to be able to introduce them to something new.”

The greatest investments Bunker teachers reported making in their students, however, were emotional. Teachers at Bunker expressed immense concern for students who faced challenges in a community marked by poverty, drug use, incarceration, transience, and gang violence. This concern was not just an intellectual accounting for students’ academic deficits; teachers’ emotional wellbeing was often bound up with the physical and emotional health of their students. English teacher Charis Doran regularly told her students:

Not to give up. That’s when it really breaks your heart [*tears up*] when you see kids that are like fourteen to fifteen years old – [*pauses as she recovers her voice*] that feel so frustrated and hopeless, they want to kill themselves or they just want to give up. And they’re so young. You know? They’re just babies. I just to try to tell ‘em that there’s this whole world out there that you don’t even know about yet. Just hang on. Things are going to get better. And that they are worth something. That there’s only one of them in the entire universe, of all eternity.

Many Bunker teachers felt a deep worry for students that stayed with them in and outside of school hours. For Charis, this worry was related to students’ ability to withstand the psychic hazards of life in Silverwood, but teachers also worried about their students’ physical wellbeing. For example, English teacher Monica Baker told me:

Once there was a shooting in the neighborhood and I was really worried for them. I came home and I was bawling to my boyfriend, ‘these kids want the best for themselves and some of them don’t even stand a chance.’ The next day, I came in and I was like, ‘Kids, I can’t even think about the lesson because I’m just so concerned for you. How are you guys doing?’ They were really kind of taken aback at that. They were like, ‘You worry about us?’ And I was like, ‘How can I not? How can you know somebody and have a relationship with somebody and just not worry?’

Monica’s response to her students is a telling example of teachers’ care at Bunker. Bunker teachers saw worry as a natural part of their work with students who faced challenging life circumstances. In both Monica’s and Charis’ cases, this worry took an emotional toll on teachers, resulting in tears. Other teachers reported paying a similar emotional price, but they also saw these emotions as an investment that could pay off through a positive student outcome stemming from their care.

An example of the kind of positive, rewarding outcome of intense emotional investment in students who were sometimes “frustrated and hopeless” came from English teacher Victoria Scott’s response to my question about a time when she felt she had an impact on a student’s life. Victoria told me the story of Omar. One day, as the class was doing a silent written exercise, Omar had his head down at his desk rather than working. Victoria passed him a note to ask what was going on, and he said that he had watched his friend get killed in a gang shooting the night before. He told Victoria that he was contemplating suicide, but together they talked through his feelings. Because he trusted

Victoria, Omar introduced Victoria to his father, who later turned to Victoria for help when he felt Omar was in trouble – once because he cheated on his high school exit exam, and again when Omar contemplated working construction like his father instead of going to college. Together, Victoria and Omar’s father helped Omar earn an associates degree at a trade college and transfer to a bachelor’s program in architectural drafting. By the time of our interview, Victoria said, “[Omar is] like my adopted child. He’s a favorite of my grandson, he comes to my family parties, we go to some of his family parties. He’s just like part of the family now.”

Victoria’s story is an example of multiple payoffs that came from Bunker teachers’ care for their students. First, Victoria felt satisfied because she helped her student grapple emotionally with a major life event (witnessing the horrific death of a friend). Second, by developing a trusting relationship with Omar and his father, Victoria was able to feel that she had contributed to her students’ upward mobility. Third, Victoria was rewarded by the close relationship she developed with her student that transcended traditional school boundaries as Omar became “just like part of the family.”

In many ways, Bunker teachers were precluded from using traditional measures of student academic performance as a yardstick to measure their success. Bunker students entered high school with deficits of economic, social, and cultural capital, lacking adequate preparation from their prior schooling, and facing challenges to school performance at home, in their community, and in the school itself. Teachers told me frequently that they measured their students’ academic progress not in terms of achieving the No Child Left Behind mandated score of “proficient” on state tests, but by improvement over time,<sup>25</sup> by students’ engagement with the material, and by classroom behavior. It was not realistic to measure their work by supposedly “universal” standards, so teachers developed their own individual measures to gain a sense that they were doing a “good job.” For example, science teacher Donna Francis told me:

Sometimes the picture has to be bigger than who’s learning about the cell and who’s not learning about the cell... Are you helping them become the person they really want to be?

Along these same lines, the psychic rewards from building caring relationships with students at Bunker did not always come from moments when students accomplished a goal or achieved upward mobility. Rather, many Bunker teachers expressed that relating to students was rewarding in and of itself. For example, math teacher Jason Trice said he that he most enjoyed:

Being able to help folks. Being able to see a product from beginning to end. Being able to hear – ‘cause I hear everything. The good and the bad of how someone turned out. I’ve got kids in prison, I’ve got kids in the cemetery, I’ve got kids in junior senate. I’ve got them all over... [Names students who attended prestigious colleges and students who joined the NFL]. Just to see the development of these humans and how they progress or digress.

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<sup>25</sup> A number of teachers reported that students entered their classes scoring far below grade level on state tests. If a student advanced from a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level to an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level in one year, for instance, the teacher would take pride in this accomplishment, even though the student still scored far below proficiency.

Jason gained personal satisfaction from participating in the lives of others. Although he hoped to positively influence his students, stories of triumph were not his only source of relational rewards. Instead, he took a “human” interest in following the life paths of his students, wherever they ended up.

Other Bunker teachers also took a human interest in their students and took an approach to their work that involved understanding that though they might contribute something positive to their students’ lives, most students would continue to confront major challenges as they grew into adulthood. English teacher Odessa Joiner, for example, said that she tried to guide her students in a positive direction by providing them with coping skills because “I know that life is not a bowl of cherries, and it’s going to be difficult. I just want them to be ready for it.” Providing this guidance gave her an alternative valuation of her work in a school marked by persistently low test scores and high dropout rates. Odessa said:

That’s why I teach. It may not be what the state wants because they can’t measure what they say they’ve learned, but if they’ve learned how to be a better human being, then they’ve learned something.

The investments of money, time, and emotion that teachers made in their students therefore cultivated a particular kind of care at Bunker. As described in Chapter 3, teachers hoped to provide their students with a “safe space” where they could take refuge from the external chaos. This safe space was highly individualized, however – though Bunker teachers provided care in their rooms, they did not have the sense that their care was supported by a cohesive network of carers. For example, Odessa said:

You try to do as much for as many as you can, but there are going to be some that slip through the cracks. Because although I might see a need, I might have to go to somebody else who can meet that or have the student tested, and when you have to depend on other people to get things in motion, it doesn’t happen as quickly as you would like and therefore some of the kids do slip through.

Odessa described students slipping through the cracks of the adult network at Bunker, a network that was extremely fragmented. In addition, without social supports for practices of care, teachers also found themselves slipping through the cracks of the school. Teachers like Sarah Hart and Hakima Green (described in Chapter 4), who had once been passionate and enthusiastic in their work, developed a feeling of burnout and a desire to quit teaching after their time at Bunker High School. Over time, as these teachers became burnt out, they began to limit their investments as well. For example, while Sarah described developing extremely trusting relationships with her students such that she brought them clothing and would hand them her car keys and money to pick up pizzas for club meetings, she also told me that she now “sprinted” to her car when the final bell rang at the end of the school day. The desire to limit one’s investment in a school where need appeared endless and there were little social supports for teachers’ care made sense to Steve Alvarez, who also debated whether to leave Silverwood for another district. While he told me he found it personally fulfilling to work with students who faced great life challenges, he added:

On the flip side of that, it is hard. It’s emotionally draining. It’s frustrating in the sense that these kids don’t have any structure in their lives, so you have to try to help them realize structure. You have to be so

much more. And all of the drama stuff, it's emotionally draining. I don't like hearing that my kids' siblings got murdered over the weekend or that they're probably or possibly being raped. It would be easier and lighter to deal with drama like their HDTV fell off the wall or the parents came back from their European vacation early and ruined the party.

Although Bunker teachers sometimes limited their investments in a fragmented social network of care, the caring they provided was oriented around safety and respite to students. They worked to foster positivity and hope among their students, even as this hope was tempered by a somewhat grim appraisal of their students' life chances. Bunker teachers were not always rewarded by payoffs from changes in their students' trajectories, but they drew psychic rewards from the act of caring itself, and from the relationships they developed through that caring. For Bunker teachers, student school success was a welcome ancillary outcome, but not necessarily at the core of their care. Instead, they took pride in being a source of positivity in a context they otherwise saw as overwhelmingly negative for their students. Donna Francis, who to the dismay of her parents chose to leave her practice as a doctor of veterinary medicine to teach science at Bunker, put it this way:

I love teaching. I love the kids. To come in class and be a sounding board for these kids that don't have one is really something. To be a voice in the storm that says "Hey! Break out of it. Get it together. You know what this is." That constant voice you hear for a year in your head. Then you see them on graduation day and they're like, "I did it!" And it's like, "Yeah! I knew you could!" That whole process to me is so much more rewarding than giving dogs shots. It's a whole human contact thing that is more important.

### **Unity – A Network of Care**

Much like at Bunker, teachers I studied at Unity High School made intense emotional, relational, and material investments as part of their caring work. Unlike Bunker, however, teachers viewed these investments as being made *both* in their students *and* in the high school. Because teachers believed in the high school as an institution that was oriented toward the best interests of the child, Unity teachers described their material investments with far less bitterness in their voices than did Bunker teachers. Whereas Bunker teachers invested to *make up for* their school's failure to appropriately provide for good teaching, Unity teachers invested to *supplement* the school's mission.

Teachers at Unity did not report experiencing the same material deficits as teachers at Bunker. Prior to the school's reinvention, Unity teachers had difficulty obtaining even basic supplies, but after the reinvention, the school's participation in the California Partnership Academy system provided access to much-needed materials. Teachers did not have the quick access to technology or other supplemental resources in the same way that Prestige teachers did through the parents' association, but they were able to write grants for needed items. Still, Prestige teachers reported making financial investments in the school. English teacher Catrina Paxton bought art supplies and posterboard for creative classroom projects. Likewise, for her art classes, Judy Barlow bought supplies each year, including "metals, paints, brushes, whatever it is I need." Her donations inspired her colleague in graphic arts, Whitney Hanlon, to make a major purchase as well. When she was hired at Unity:

My classroom had all the oldest computers, and we didn't have enough. We couldn't get any more money... so I ended up buying a lot of materials myself. Like, I spent \$3000 on a silkscreening press, and I just took my whole paycheck and just bought a press.

Before coming to Unity, Whitney's first teaching job had been at a high-performing high school with a wealthy student population in a nearby Los Angeles suburb. Whitney went on to say:

Working at [the wealthy school], I wouldn't have spent \$3000 of my own money to buy equipment. But I did it at Unity because I knew that the kids needed somebody to make a sacrifice for them. I mean, my \$3000 looks like nothing compared to [Judy's] probably cumulative \$50,000 that she's spent on those kids in her 15 years teaching.

Whitney was able to conceive of her material investment in Unity High School as appropriate where it might have been inappropriate at the wealthy school because of the perceived need of Unity students. This need was not just a material need for resources; instead, Whitney perceived that her students needed the personal support of having an adult make caring sacrifices on their behalf. Whitney also conceived of this need as appropriate because she was able to see role models of sacrifice – like Judy Barlow – and because she had a sense that her investment was a contribution made as part of a caring community of adults.

Another important role model for investment was Harry Oden. A number of teachers referred to Harry as demonstrating the intense care for students that they took pride in as part of the Unity High School spirit. Like Judy Barlow, Harry was a white graduate of Unity High School who lived in the neighborhood. Harry became a teacher in his late 30s after a career as a machinist. Drawing upon the skills and work ethic he developed in his previous occupation, Harry invested hundreds of hours of physical labor and thousands of dollars into the school. In his classroom, he had floor-to ceiling window treatments in school colors, a handmade desk, and a ceiling mounted LCD projector and screen that he had bought. Harry had also purchased his own printer, copy machine, and test scanner, had repainted hallways and cleaned the skylights in the main schoolbuilding, and had renovated a parents center, complete with refinished floors and trim, brand new couches, and other clean comfortable furniture.

Harry told me that he made these investments to counter the “hidden curriculum” that told students they were worthless and parents they were not valued by school. He felt that this “curriculum” was codified in facilities that were run-down or cold and impersonal. Harry also made these material investments because he worried that schools wasted money that should be directed toward students, but he believed that by working hard with the students' best interest in mind, teachers could improve these conditions.

Although Harry was the only teacher who made intense investment in the school physical plant, he also made investments that were far more typical of Unity teachers. Harry invested his time in students by developing personal relationships that extended beyond school boundaries. Following a field trip to a nearby museum, Harry took students who expressed interest in the trip to other museums on the weekends, including trips where he met up with students and their families. Other teachers engaged in similar activities with students outside of school, taking students out to dinner, to see a dance troupe or a play, to visit the Watts towers, or to learn to snowboard. Teachers at Unity

expressed the desire to provide their students with “special” experiences, like the choir teacher who arranged for one night of the school musical to be performed on a chartered yacht, and to expose them to a variety of learning opportunities that might spark a passion in their students. They did so with the assurance that other teachers were making similar investments, so that while they may not individually connect with *each* student, teachers generally felt confident that Unity teachers as a whole were reaching out to form personalized relationships with youth at Unity High School.

In addition to these special trips, teachers also invested money in students they saw as facing financial challenges at home and life challenges in their community and in their families. Judy told me, “I’m known to donate a lot of money. And it helps. We have kids who can’t do things, and I don’t want to see them not be able to do it just because of a \$5 or \$10 fee.” Teachers also kept food in their classrooms for hungry students, bought clothes for students who had been kicked out of their homes, and bought baby supplies for pregnant students. Teachers also sometimes acted as caseworkers for their students to make up for perceived deficits in social services. For example, special education teacher Brian Yates made sure to follow up on his students’ housing placements by talking to parents, social services, courts, and their previous teachers. Unity teachers also made immense investments of time, providing tutoring and talking with students at lunch and after school.

Alongside investments of time and money, teachers made emotional investments in their students and involved their own subjectivity when interacting with students to build authentic relationships. For example, Brian Yates invested his thoughtfulness and honesty in interacting with students to develop trust. He said:

They trust me and I love them. Unconditionally... [T]hey all come to me to talk. I give them objective advice and they respect me. And that’s really tough because they don’t really respect a lot of people. But the number one thing is that I’m honest with them.

Graphic arts teacher Whitney Hanlon also put her self on the line, making clear to students the standards to which she held herself as a teacher, and asking that they hold her accountable. She told me:

I have rules for the teacher that are based on my faith, which is to show love. So love is patient, love is kind, love is not selfish, love is not easily angered. So I have this set of rules, this big poster on my wall: “Rules for the Teacher,” and it’s basically love... I tell the kids, if I break one of my rules, you can give me a penalty too.

Many of the Unity teachers I interviewed also felt that they could relate to the challenges students faced based on their own racial or socioeconomic background, and they would use stories from their own lives to express sympathy or help students solve a problem. African American and Latino teachers expressed that it was important for their students to see role models of color in the classroom, and so invested in being a highly visible, positive presence in the school. For example, biracial African American and Spanish social science teacher Emilio Landrum said:

Especially for adolescents, I might be the only Black male of this age that they know that’s doing something positive, so why would I want to limit how they can contact me or when they can visit me or what they see?



Likewise, Latino career teacher Oscar Vega told me that he drew upon his personal background and his success in the advertising world to inspire students: I let them know that I came from same kind of background. I grew up in East LA. It's familiar. That lets them know they can go the same route. I let them see some of my prettiest [advertising work with] Target, Sears, Round Table, Little Caesars... Like, 'You can do this too. If I did it and I come from the same area, the same background, the same kind of school, there's no reason why you can't.'

Whereas teachers of color invested their racial-ethnic subjectivity as self-conscious role models for their students, both white teachers and teachers of color from various socioeconomic backgrounds shared aspects of their personal lives to strengthen relationships with young people. For example, white English teacher Catrina Paxton said:

I talk about my son a lot. When I pull out my laptop, his picture's always on my desktop. So they know when his karate tournament's coming up or his piano recital... I really feel the kids need to feel that you're a person and you love them. I'm always telling them I love them, which a young, attractive teacher couldn't do, but I'm like their mamas so I feel like I can do it.

As Catrina's quote illustrates, teachers invested various aspects of the self, including faith, honesty, social background, gender, and age, to show their students love and care and to foster trust. Teachers also shared stories from their own lives so that students would feel comfortable sharing as well. For example, Whitney Hanlon told me that she was able to make connections with "kids with abnormal circumstances or at-risk kids" because she had a troubled relationship with her parents during childhood. Likewise, Judy Barlow's son survived late-stage cancer in early adolescence. Sharing her fear for her son's life was "an open door for [students] so that they can then share with me. A lot of our kids do have tragedy."

Like teachers at Bunker, teachers at Unity acknowledged that their students faced challenges in their community and understood supporting students through these challenges as critical to their work. In many cases, Unity teachers also described appreciating relationships with students for the sake of human connectedness and were able to embrace relationships that did not guarantee students' eventual school and career success. There were important differences in teacher-student care at Unity and Bunker, however. Because Unity teachers had access to resources and a strong culture of community with their colleagues, they felt that they were part of a web of support for their students, rather than creating an individual refuge. Thus, when I asked Vernon Griffith about a time when he impacted a student's life, he responded by telling me two stories. One was about an African American boy who had been kicked out of Unity but who returned to become a star football player through Vernon's "loving support" at school and in the neighborhood. The other story was about a shy Latina student who worked on her writing one-on-one with Vernon and was admitted to UC Berkeley despite once believing that she would not be able to attend college. At the end of these stories, Vernon switched from describing his own contributions to these students to the first person plural, saying, "We've impacted many students and that's our job, that's our responsibility, that's our calling."

A source of variation between Unity and at Bunker had to do with teachers' use of student academic performance as a measure of success in their work. Because a number of Unity students matriculated at 4-year colleges after high school, Unity teachers told more stories of helping their students continue on to higher education compared with Bunker teachers. Unity teachers also appeared more hopeful about their ability to help students achieve upward mobility. However, this hope was not absolute. Teachers knew that many students, especially those in foster care and in group homes, faced challenges at home that could not be remedied through education. They also lamented that many undocumented students would not be able to attend college due to a lack of financial aid<sup>26</sup> and because they were not eligible for opportunities like federally funded internships. Unity teachers were also acutely aware that the challenges students faced could result in death; during the year in which I conducted my interviews, there were two tragic incidents that affected all teachers on a deep, emotional level – the suicide of a former student, who was also the brother of a current Unity senior, and the shooting death of a student whose twin brother also attended the school.

These tragedies took an immense emotional toll on teachers who invested deeply in their students. Curtis Murray, a lifelong Amapola resident and Unity social science teacher who lived only blocks from the school and regularly opened his home to students and other neighborhood kids, described this toll:

Curtis: We had a kid that was murdered up here last year, and this kid, ah man, just touched my heart. The light had came on for him [*chokes up*] Sorry, I'm getting emotional. He had really turned a corner. And then to see him get gunned down like that. Waste. Terrible waste. And sometimes you have those incidents. Excuse me [*wipes tears*] So you know, that hurts you. It gets you. When you see a kid just slip away...  
Jessica: What do you do to keep yourself going when stuff like that happens?

Curtis: We had to sit down and have a roundtable with the kids 'cause it crushed the kids too. We had to say look, this is all part of life. And it's a terrible situation, but those things happen, and you got to be able to rebound. We got to keep going. Got to keep pushing. So that was just tough. And I've had those throughout. Every year, there's something like that. Where you really think you're making headway with a kid, and then all of a sudden, [*slaps hands*] out of your control. And what do you do? Because you really become attached to them, you know? And that's how I feel about teaching. I really buy into the kid and they buy into me. So I think that's what makes it a pleasurable thing. And then when you lose, you just, ah man, its bad news.

Curtis was heartbroken at the loss of a student with whom he had a close personal relationship and for whom he and many other teachers had high hopes. For teachers at Unity, however, the death of significant others was also a “part of life” to be weathered in

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<sup>26</sup> My interviews took place only months before California AB 130 and AB 131 were signed into effect. These pieces of legislation made otherwise qualified undocumented students who had attended high school in California for three years or more eligible for in-state tuition and financial aid.

community. Unity teachers described sharing grief with students, teachers, and family members by attending funerals, visiting homes, and raising money for families through carwashes and bake sales. Unity teachers believed in their faculty culture and were also proud of students for supporting one another; for example, several of the teachers told me that only weeks after her brother's death by suicide, the student body elected the bereaved girl prom queen. Although teachers had to withstand great emotional pain as part of their caring, they did so in community, and they were rewarded by the caring relationships that developed among students and teachers. Though incidents like these were painful, they were also a part of what made Unity teachers proud of their work, as Whitney Hanlon illustrated:

When I learned that [the student was shot and killed...], I wrote him a letter. And I wrote it on the board so the kids could see what I was thinking too, and I was able to feel like, yeah, I'd done everything I could. I hadn't let those ones slip by. So knowing that, if they died tomorrow, had I given them everything that I could? And was what I gave them something that would help their life, not just [*pauses*] math.

### **Prestige – Care Bounded by Privilege**

Though Prestige teachers also valued caring, personal relationships with their students, the nature of care at this school differed from caring at Bunker or Unity. This is largely because teachers perceived their school and their students as having very different needs from the other two schools I studied. Prestige students generally came from affluent families, so teachers made few material investments in their care, though they did offer students their time well outside of paid working hours. Although Prestige students required less material care than students at the other two schools, Prestige teachers felt concern for their students and sought to provide various forms of emotional care. But the teachers were hesitant to intervene in their students' personal lives out of fear that they might cross a line with parents.

Teachers had little need to purchase class materials because Prestige High School was well funded. A few teachers described spending their own money on supplies for students because they could not wait for parents' organizations to follow through on requests for supplies. Even in these cases, the amount they spent did not exceed a few hundred dollars a year. George Reedy, a special education teacher who purchased pencils, pens, and paper for his students told me, "Overall, that's unique in this school in that we have the support of the community, so if we really need something, we can get it."

Although Prestige teachers spent little personal money on their school, these teachers described making investments in their students by sacrificing personal time. Teachers took pride in the numerous clubs and extracurricular activities they offered, and many teachers chose to volunteer significant hours outside of school to coach sports, oversee after-school activities or take club-members to events. Teachers also observed that because the academic standards of Prestige were very high, they spent more time on grading and lesson preparation than they might at some other schools.

The academic focus of Prestige High School carried through into teachers' caring work with students. Prestige teachers were concerned with the "whole child," but the structuring of the school led them to primarily focus on students' academic growth as

opposed to other aspects of personal development. For example, Vanessa Farris told me that she felt rewarded when she saw students:

Grow and change. It's great to see students move from honors to AP, to see them go through the college application process and write their letters of rec. It's just amazing to get to be a part of that whole growth. It's awe-inspiring.

Along these same lines, when I asked her to describe a teacher at Prestige considered to be especially caring, science teacher Marci Wick named:

Brent Kepley. He's one of those teachers that if I have a low-end kid in the 8th grade that needs to get some science, if I send them to Brent [for high school], I know that he'll embrace them and he won't be easy on them... Brent loves rocks, and he just gets these kids so into it. They bring in the rocks and share. Kids that thought they never could do science... He's just so calm and patient. I really respect him.

Teachers at Prestige saw emotional caring as an important element of the academic process. To get students who were otherwise alienated from school or uninterested in the course material to engage the curriculum, teachers had to take an interest in their students' emotions and bring excitement to the classroom. Thus, many Prestige teachers' stories of rewarding moments or personal triumphs involved a student who became involved in school or interested in a subject through their caring efforts. Teachers believed that such caring, combined with pedagogical skill and subject expertise, were the factors that made a great teacher. For example, Andrew Stetler told me:

I am very personal, meaning that I use a lot of my own life experiences to teach. I make things emotional because one of the sociologists in education or one of the gurus in education said that if you can put some emotion on it, the kids are going to remember it. They still remember the day I was talking about Newton's first law, net force, and I talked about when I jumped out of an airplane. And I get up on a table and I illustrate it to them. I try to make it real to them. I tell stories, trying to weave things together. And I try to connect with the students. I try to notice if they're having a bad day. I try to notice if maybe I should move their seats because they're getting poorer grades because they're flirting too much with their tablemate.

Like teachers at other schools, Prestige teachers made emotional investments in their work and in their students, but these investments were generally much lighter than the intense feelings of worry, grief, and triumph experienced by Unity and Bunker teachers. Indeed, the majority of these emotional investments were far closer to the emotion work described by Arlie Hochschild (Hochschild [1983] 2003) that is used to project a feeling of happiness or enthusiasm as part of performing service work. Prestige teachers rarely reported empathetic sharing of grief or trauma; most often, they talked about exhorting their students to feel upbeat about academics and invested in school.

Lighter forms of interaction were not the whole of teachers' relationships with students at Prestige, however. Some teachers found moments when students were able to open up about their personal lives and lean on them for support through the positive connections they had formed in the classroom. Andrew Stetler described one of these

key moments. He told me that he talked to a girl who had been struggling in his course, and she opened up about her eating disorder. He said:

We're not supposed to hug our kids, but she needed a hug, and you know, when she's crying, it's kind of hard not to. When you open your soul up to the students, they sometimes give you a slice, a view of their [soul] – that's the student I love.

Andrew's quote illustrates that teachers at Prestige were capable of finding deeper relationships and emotional connections that were more characteristic of Unity and Bunker High. However, moments like these were rare in Prestige interviews; when talking about their relationships with students, teachers were far more likely to focus on students who were particularly helpful or intelligent, or who had shown improvement in their schoolwork.

Though the emotional investments Prestige teachers made in their students were lighter than at other schools, teachers at Prestige did still offer pieces of their selves and their emotions to their students. For example, English teacher Lucy Monahan privately prayed for her students, especially students who acted up in class. Spanish teacher Inez Darr invited her AP students to her home each year for a dinner of paella and a Flamenco performance. Korean teacher Jin Lee talked to her students about how she experienced her parents' divorce so that they would know they were not alone. And social science teacher Will Armor told me that he once had a student on the football team who intimated that he might be suicidal, and Will referred this student to a school counselor. Though Will said such incidents were "not the norm," he also said "that stuff I really take home. It really sticks with me for awhile."

Teachers at Prestige rarely reported the kind of intense interpersonal connections described by teachers at the other schools I studied, and as such, they experienced neither the great emotional sacrifices nor the relational rewards that were available at Bunker and Unity. Part of this was related to students' perceived needs. Prestige students faced fewer challenges due to their parents' wealth and because they lived in a high-income community where deadly violence was rare and gangs were not present. However, teachers still worried about their students' emotional wellbeing. The teachers I interviewed worried about pressures on their students to perform academically and fit in socially, about drug and alcohol abuse, about sex and pregnancy, and about neglect or abuse at home. Thus, Prestige teachers still suspected that their students were in need of care. However, because of the power of parents in the district related to their financial contributions and their entitlement to make demands of teachers, teachers felt limited in their ability to intervene in students' lives and uncertain about what kinds of care were appropriate for teachers to offer. For example, science teacher Vanessa Farris told me that she worried about the drugs and alcohol that were available to students in Juniper and wished she could influence adolescents to be more careful. However, she added:

I don't want to be like, 'oh, this is the worst thing ever,' but how much more likely are they to be in a car accident or to do something really stupid or regrettable or get pregnant or whatnot? So, I mean, *I just feel like I don't really have that much power in it*, not being their parent and not living in the community and not knowing specifics. I can just put my two cents in here and there [emphasis mine].

In Vanessa's case, the power of parents in Prestige created a situation in which she was uncertain about whether and how to intervene on her students' behalf. English teacher Marci Wick expressed similar concerns about drugs and alcohol and would carefully choose classes of students who she "trusted" to share a personal story about a friend who had died from alcohol abuse because she feared that with the wrong class, her words might be "twisted." Marci, who lived in the Prestige suburb, also stated that she did not feel prepared to deal with student problems such as depression or drug abuse, and quickly referred those students to a counselor. She added:

I often know more about the outside world of these children than my colleagues do, and so it's sometimes hard 'cause I maybe have more compassion because I know what's going on, but it's definitely not appropriate for me to go in and tell all my staff members, 'Do you know this parent is an alcoholic?'

The power of parents in the Prestige community limited teachers' investments in care in other ways as well. For example, after a fabricated accusation of favoritism from the father of one of her students, Korean teacher Jin Lee was careful to never attend her students' family functions, even though invitations from the local Korean community were common. Likewise, because Prestige had a rigorous tenure process, in the year he was up for tenure, Will Armor was cautious not to throw his full support behind a student who challenged the principal and school board about student parking.

However, even within the structure of parental power in Prestige, there were spaces for teachers to make caring interventions in student lives. For example, science teacher Marci Wick saw it as her mission to support students on campus who struggled to find a social group at school. She sponsored a student leadership club that she invited socially isolated students to join and found resources to develop their interests. The institutional niche where teachers had the most room to provide their students with emotional care was within the special education program – a program in which parents often felt vulnerable and dependent upon the expertise of the teacher, reversing the normal dynamic of status in parent-teacher interactions.

Special education teacher George Reedy managed a caseload of Prestige students who had learning disabilities and emotional disturbances. George came early to school, stayed late, and kept his door open at lunch to encourage his students to talk openly with him about school and their home lives. He also gave his phone number to parents so they could reach him if their child needed help. Because of this intense contact, George was fully exposed to a side of life in Prestige that other teachers only glimpsed. He described to me student problems of self-harm, of improperly managed psychotropic medications, pressure for a significant romantic relationship, and abuse at home, and told about families who could not provide lunch money. Still, like other teachers at Prestige, George primarily focused his emotions and practices of care on matters relating to school. He reaped psychic rewards not from student academic performance but from making sure kids who faced school challenges had a positive experience of high school. When I asked how he knew if he was doing a good job, George replied:

The typical teacher here will say test scores and assessment results. And I look at 'em, I have to, I have to look at things statistically. And by God, they're all going to pass that high school exit exam if I have to shove it down their throats. But that's the administration and the government

looking in. I want kids to enjoy school... Again, I have kids who haven't had success in school, so I feel it's my calling to change that. And that's what I like to see. And I would say I'm effective in that way with 90% of the kids. There's always a couple I can't reach. But I want them to enjoy school. And when they do, I dig it. I can tell.

### **Conclusion**

Although care was integral to the work of all of the teachers I interviewed, the contexts of the three different schools I studied conditioned the kinds of investments teachers made in their students and their school. The emotional relationships that developed between teachers and students therefore varied greatly among the three schools. At Bunker, teachers were intensely concerned with creating a safe space for their students and were rewarded by intense emotional connections with students within that safe space. Bunker teachers could not count on students' academic development as a reward for their work, and their investments were made within the context of a chaotic school context that *subtracted* resources from both teachers and their students (Valenzuela 1999). Thus, teachers' caring at Bunker was individualized, rather than understood as part of a caring institution; teachers often felt burnt out in their care; and teachers were focused more on their students' personal wellbeing for the time being than on long-term mobility.

At Unity, strong bonds among teachers and access to material resources through the school's participation in the California Partnership Academy system made it possible for teachers to make investments of time, money, emotion, and self in both individual students and in the school as a whole. As at Bunker, Unity teachers expressed deep concern about the challenges students faced outside of school, and their relationships sometimes took a great emotional toll on teachers. However, Unity teachers also hoped that through caring relationships, they could assist their students create a path to a brighter future. The school context of Unity High School facilitated caring relationships between teachers and students that provided teachers with psychic rewards that were both intrinsic to emotional relationships and related to a shared vision of helping to improve the likelihood of positive long-term student outcomes.

Teachers at Prestige High School made the lowest investments in their work, and they also reaped fewer emotional rewards from their caring relationships than did teachers at the other two schools. Because of their racial-ethnic and class privilege, Prestige students faced fewer life challenges than students in the other two schools; however, Prestige teachers still expressed concern for their students' personal development and identified barriers to their healthy growth such as emotional challenges, risks related to sex and pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse. Prestige teachers' investments in care were not only limited by a reduced *need* for care in comparison to other schools but also by the relative cultural and economic capital held by parents in the district. Powerful parents meant that there were clearer lines between school, which was supposed to be oriented toward academic goals, and home, where care for the whole person was appropriate. Prestige teachers therefore felt uncertain in their ability to intervene in students' personal situations and made most of their caring investments in students' school- and academic-related personal growth.

The teachers I interviewed were aware of some of the differences in caring relationship in different kinds of schools. Teachers in all three schools were attuned to

the fact that emotional demands on teachers, as well as the rewards, were higher in schools where students faced conditions of poverty. Thus, when I asked Prestige English teacher Marci Wick what she imagined it would be like to work at Unity High School down the road, she responded:

[At Prestige, the students] know they're going to go to college. And [at Unity], you have to inspire them and keep that going and encourage them to go on. So that would be different. I think it would be so much more challenging. Much more challenging. Although in some ways, I think it could be more rewarding. You know, I think you could really see kids maybe overcoming some bad situations. Although we have plenty here. I mean, we're not immune. But to see a kid really grow and develop and reach their dreams and potential, I think would be fantastic. And I think you maybe can do more of that there.

Although the student need faced by teachers at Unity and Bunker High Schools was emotionally challenging, the teachers also experienced the process of providing intense emotional care for their students as life-altering. That is, teachers at Bunker and Unity were able to work deeply and actively on developing a more caring self through relationships with students. Bunker English teacher Brittany Reed put it this way:

[Being a teacher] changes who you are. You learn a lot. The kids teach you more than you teach them. They've made me stronger than I ever thought I could be. When I go back to [hometown] to visit friends, I just can't believe how – I could not imagine ever being the same person again. You become stronger, you become more, I think, in touch with reality in a way because you see the harshness of reality... And it's something that you just become a different person. That's what teaching is.

Rather than discuss teachers' caring in dichotomous and individualized terms (e.g., the "caring" vs. "uncaring" teacher), the data presented in this chapter should encourage scholars to imagine care as intrinsic to being a teacher. Teaching is intensely relational, bringing teachers into close contact with children who have varying needs for care. These children can place heavy emotional demands on their interpersonal relationships with teachers and often expect to receive more than instruction (Davidson 1996; Lewis and Kim 2008). This may especially be true for students who are traditionally underserved by formal institutions and discriminated against in daily life; Betty Achinstein and Julie Aguirre (2008:1514) found that non-white students would test the cultural identification of their novice teachers of color because "students wanted to see their connectedness to the teacher." Because of the importance of relationships to the process of becoming a teacher, the authors concluded that "teachers are socialized within school and classroom contexts impacted by student communities" (Achinstein and Aguirre 2008:1509).

Though a "banking" model of education has long been used by social reproduction theorists to describe the model of learning embraced by schools at the institutional level (Freire 2000; Bowles and Gintis 2002), this concept is less useful when describing the classroom interactions of teachers and students. Students are not vessels into which education can be deposited, even if some philosophies of teaching represent them as such. Instead, students are classroom actors with whom teachers find themselves engaged in complex relationships.



Following my interviews with teachers in three schools that presented remarkably different contexts for teachers' work, I suggest that direct student-teacher interactions are salient in other ways for social reproduction. My data suggest that teachers attempt to engage in caring relationships because doing so provides them with psychic rewards. These caring relationships can also be beneficial to students, allowing them to better engage in the learning process and satisfying student needs beyond simple academics. However, the culture and organizational arrangements particular to each school limited the ability of its teachers to provide care. Though teachers' decisions about investments in their school and their relationships with students were intensely personal, their caring was also inherently social. That is, teachers required networks of care and structural supports for their caring to not feel burnt out on the sacrifices they made for their students. Thus, despite the best efforts of concerned and motivated individuals, without institutional and social supports, teachers can fail to intervene in the life trajectories of students and meet their varied needs.

## Chapter 6

### Teachers' Personal Growth in Unique Contexts for Care

The work people do enters into their conscious and unconscious experiences of self (Rose 1990), and most teachers care deeply about the welfare and responses of students. How does the position of their students within hierarchies of privilege enter into the ways in which teachers respond to them? How do these hierarchies influence teachers' understanding of the self and their own work? When schools are firmly situated in larger structures of quarantined disadvantage, how do caring relationships developed within school contexts affect teachers' ability to grapple with inequality across schools?

In this chapter, I focus on three individual narratives that highlight connections between personal biography and school context. Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated that "care" is not just a personal characteristic but also a social phenomenon influenced by teachers' work in particular contexts of need and with particular resources to meet those needs. Moving back to the personal level, this chapter draws on three emotion-laden stories to show how teachers' biographies led them to work in a particular school because of the issues and ideas they cared most about, and then to examine how each context for care shaped their continued personal growth. These stories also highlight how *teachers'* isolation within particular context of quarantined disadvantage constrain or promote different types of interventions into broader social inequalities.

The three individuals I chose for this chapter were all motivated to teach by a strong commitment to students in need of care due to some form of social marginalization. Each respondent to this project had a unique and compelling story explaining how they became a teacher and how teaching had changed them over time. However, I selected these three narratives because these particular teachers – Edward Shaw at Bunker, Claire Unger at Prestige, and Brenda Cox at Unity – chose their school (the first at which any of them worked as a full time teacher) based on their idea of what student needs they were well equipped meet. That is, these teachers entered into teaching because of their desire to engage in particular kinds of care.

According to the literature on teaching as work, one characteristic that supposedly distinguishes teaching from other professions is teachers' inability to "choose" their clients (Beijaard, Verloop et al. 2000; Vanderstraeten 2007). My interviews with teachers suggest that this characterization is not entirely correct. Although it is true that teachers cannot choose which students in particular are assigned to their classroom, teachers often make very real choices about which student populations are most appropriate for their investments of care. Under striking conditions of school inequality, students' race and class are bound up in teachers' decisions about where to conduct their work. These decisions have consequences for the type of relationships teachers engage in, and how they mature through these relationships.

The personal narratives presented below describe three teachers' biographical trajectory toward teaching in their school, the particular ways they cared for students, and the personal growth they experienced through processes of caring. These narratives reflect teachers' perceptions of the racialized and classed environments of their school and what populations they felt equipped to work with. These narratives also reflect

teachers' beliefs about social justice and what it means for a teacher to effect change in young lives.

**Edward Shaw – “There’s love, obviously”**

Edward Shaw was a white teacher in his mid-30s with dark brown hair, amber eyes, and tattoos covering both arms. During our interview, he rarely smiled as he talked seriously and deliberately, with a deep voice. Edward spoke vehemently of his disgust with other teachers, with the administration of his school, and with negative stereotypes of the city of Silverwood; but it quickly became clear that he was devoted to his students, with whom he formed deep personal bonds. Edward was also self-reflexive about his own subjectivity in the context of Silverwood – what it meant to be a white man working in a school with a history of virulent white flight. He worried about being perceived as an interloper, but he also felt a deep connection to his students and reaped rewards from working in Bunker. These experiences kept him at the school.

In discussing his motivation to teach at Bunker and the aspects of his work that he most enjoyed, Edward described himself as different from other people. Instead of finding the “anarchy” of Bunker High School uncomfortable, Edward embraced the chaos because of the personal challenge it offered him. Describing a conversation with a former assistant principal at Bunker, he said:

She told me, ‘You know what I like about this place? Because there is no structure in this place, the only relationships that you form are the ones that you form every single day. You have to build those bridges every single day. And I like that.’ And when she said that, it made a lot of sense because I’m the exact same way. I like that too. I like that challenge. Now, most people would flee, I think, from that situation. But when she said that to me, it clicked... And it makes everything harder too, it does... But when you do form those relationships [with students and other teachers], they’re that much more meaningful.

In this quote, Edward described himself as taking emotional satisfaction in the very aspects of Bunker that others might consider frustrating obstacles. This was also true of his decision to work in Silverwood. Edward had attended a prestigious Master’s program in teaching with a “social justice” focus at a private university. After he was offered the position at Bunker, Edward went back to his class and encouraged other students to apply to the district as well, only to be met with disapproval:

The instructor of that class was horrified. Horrified that not only was I taking that job, but that I was trying to encourage my classmates to come with me. She gave me a whole speech about how awful Silverwood is and about how I wasn't going to last there and it’s not teaching. It was the most insane thing. And it’s one of these persons where every other word they say is social justice... I called my dad and asked him about the situation and he said, ‘well, this is kind of a no-brainer.’ He said, ‘where do they need good teachers the most?’ It was like, yeah, that's kind of what I was thinking. So that's why I decided to go to Silverwood. Plus, it seemed like the craziest thing to do. That's more what I’m geared to. ‘Oh, this is something no one else wants to do because people think it’s dangerous for no reason at all.’ So that's why I went to Silverwood.

Edward's desire to do the "craziest thing" by teaching at Bunker and to care for kids who others considered "dangerous for no reason at all" was related to his personal background. Because he had epilepsy, Edward took psychotropic medication throughout childhood, which caused him to withdraw socially. He "felt in the core of my being" that teachers "despised" him because he was socially awkward despite testing well, though Edward was also inspired in his decision to teach by "teachers who were not only really knowledgeable in their subjects but really compassionate. Really understanding of people who deviated from the norm." As an adolescent, Edward withdrew further from school, eventually developing a drug addiction and behavioral problems in school. After being kicked out of four different schools, Edward left high school in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. For many years he attended community college and played as a musician in bands while working low-wage jobs before he found a catalog for the New School on a friend's coffee table. Reading that brochure was a "pivotal moment" for Edward, who realized that "this exists. A university exists for me and for people just like me... A genuine weirdo who has done something else with their life."

In building relationships with his students, Edward shared his personal history, though he withheld certain pieces of information from his students, such as his drug addiction and the "partying" he had done in his teens and twenties. He felt the purpose of these stories was not to unburden his conscience, but to create opportunities for positive connections with students:

I tell everyone that I'm a high school dropout on the first day. And that the truth is, by the time they get to my class, they're farther along in their high school career than I ever was. So I try to tell them some stories of my high school experience that will somehow try to reach everyone in the room. Like the really high-achieving kids along with the little misfit kids. I get along with the jocks because I'm a total jock, and like everybody in between.

Edward fostered these connections because he felt they helped his students engage with him as a teacher, with school, and with the course curriculum but also because he found intense personal fulfillment in forming caring relationships with his students. When I asked Edward what he liked most about teaching, he responded:

The kids. Forming those relationships with students. I think I realized at a certain point that... unconsciously I was trying to make amends for my own very serious transgressions as a teenager... As I became an adult and was capable of things like shame and embarrassment, I realized that I felt very badly about poor decisions that I had made. So that was part of it. At the core of all of it is something selfish. It's something that I'm doing for me. But there's more to it than that. There's love, obviously.

Edward expressed love for his students both within and outside of school settings. Extending relationships beyond school boundaries, Edward and another teacher took it upon themselves to help an undocumented student who was kicked out of her father's house shortly after her mother passed away. He said:

We bought her an entirely new wardrobe for her junior year. During those times... she was living at a distant relative's house, she would go and sit in her aunt's truck every night and cry herself to sleep, she would call *me*.

She had no adult, there was no adult left in her life that she trusted and felt comfortable with.

Through the trusting relationship they had built, Edward was able to secure free psychological services for the student through a local non-profit and to continue to support her academically as she enrolled in community college. He said of this relationship, "That's why I teach. Because I get to have relationships like that."

Within the classroom, Edward also attempted to foster caring relationships. Edward had started a philosophy class at the school, which required him not only to put together a syllabus, but to file extensive paperwork to get the course to qualify as satisfying one of the requirements for admission to one of the California public university systems. Drawing on what he learned as a philosophy and anthropology major in college, Edward created a high school course that was both personally fulfilling and that would engage his students intellectually. In his English class, Edward wrote a final that was designed to get students to be self-reflexive; he asked students to discuss their own goals for personal growth and for their community. The final succeeded beyond his expectations in allowing his students not only to reflect but also to build relationships with one another:

It turned out to be the most meaningful experience I've ever had in the classroom because there were classes where kids stood up, the last kids you would ever think, and this happened a lot, where a kid stood up and said, 'I've been dealing drugs for the last three years to help my mom pay the rent and I fucking hate it and I don't want to be a drug dealer. I want to be a vet, or whatever.' And kids just broke down... I would have 100% attendance for the first time in months for this assignment for the kids to get together and talk about what they wanted for themselves and for their community. Kids talked about getting molested, being abused, just the most horrible shit, openly. A Special Ed kid stood up, no one expected him to, and just tore into everyone. He was like, 'You all call me retarded. You all think that I'm slow.' He said, 'I am slow. I know that I'm slow.' And the way that he said it was so fucked up and so heavy. He was like, 'Sometimes I see something, and it's right in front of me, but I can't touch it.' It was like everyone held their breath through the whole time he was talking and then right after that... class broke and everyone was out in the yard and all these girls went up to him and hugged him, and took photos with him and stuff... They had been in school together for 12 years a lot of them. And I guarantee that it was the first time that he had ever been hugged.

For Edward, it was personally important to give his students moments like these, where they could allow themselves to be vulnerable and develop as caring, compassionate individuals. Edward did not invest in care for the sake of a universalized value of compassion. Edward specifically tied this type of care to a mission of social justice related to race and class inequality. That is, the type of caring Edward engaged in was specifically tied to the students he taught and his school context framed against a larger backdrop of societal inequities. He told me about a friend who taught in a private school in Los Angeles attended by child stars and the children of celebrities. "I wouldn't last a day in that school," he said. When I asked why not, Edward responded:

I couldn't deal with that population. I just couldn't deal with that sort of privilege very well. I come from a very comfortable middle class background myself, but I couldn't deal with that. I think the kids in Silverwood really are a strength. Because there's a pride that they have in Silverwood.

Edward invested considerable time in supporting his students' pride in the face of extreme stigmatization of outsiders who understood Silverwood only in terms of gang violence and the famous rappers the city produced. At the time of our interview, Edward was coordinating with local community leaders to create an after-school program that would support the academic engagement of African American and Latino boys in Silverwood. Two years earlier, he sponsored the formation of a student group in response to a racist incident at a prestigious California college where a fraternity sponsored an event called the Silverwood BBQ during Black History Month. The flyers for the event drew on Silverwood's image as a poor, Black "ghetto," propagating repugnant stereotypes of African Americans as "humor." Personally offended by the incident, Bunker students formed a group to respond publically to the incident and to combat racism. Edward sponsored the group, which wrote a letter of protest. In response, the college extended to a select number of Bunker students free participation in a summer program in science. For the past two summers, Edward traveled to the college with his students, developing close bonds over the course of weeks spent in dorms, to the point where his summer students all called him "stepdad."

Although Edward appreciated the challenge of creating and sustaining relationships at Bunker, he also encountered obstacles to engaging in practices of care. Materially, he said, "resources are nonexistent" at Bunker, and organizationally, the school struggled to create an appropriate context for learning through consistent scheduling and personnel policies. Edward believed that "the kids are the easy part of the job; the hardest part is the adults." Edward had experienced conflicts with other teachers, especially a department chair who untruthfully told him he would receive a pink slip after a personal argument and another teacher who spread a rumor that Edward was having sex with a student. Edward attributed these problems not to only to individual teachers' personalities, but also to disorganization at the school level. He cited the example of a teacher he considered a friend who was going through a divorce. The other teacher would clock in, arrange for his students to go to other classrooms, and then leave at 9:30am after asking Edward to sign him out at the end of the day. Despite these problems, Edward felt he had a core group of teaching colleagues in whom he could confide, stating that "it would be really hard if that were not here."

With these friends, Edward was able to do the self-reflexive work that he considered critical to his teaching practice. In discussing his own whiteness in relation to his teaching, Edward told me that he complained to a good friend, an African American man who was also a Bunker teacher, that the principal never said "hi" to him in the hallway. Rather than sympathizing, the friend challenged Edward:

[He] was like, 'Check this out, Shaw. How do you think he sees you?'

And I was like, 'what are you talking about?' He was like, 'Look at how you carry yourself. Every time you walk in a room, you think that you are the smartest person in the room...' And he was like, '[Principal Grey] is fucking 70 years old from the backwoods of Louisiana. You think that

guy hasn't met white people just like you before?' Of course. And it really brought it home for me. It was really like, oh yeah, that's right. I'm just like any other fucking uptight cracker motherfucker and racist asshole that he's ever met. Because I do carry myself in this way. And so I really had to look at myself and see how I could carry myself a little differently. So, whiteness is always there. And being a white male is always there.

For Edward, teaching at Bunker allowed him reflect on his own white privilege, thus contributing to his personal growth. At the same time, Edward also drew a sense of self-worth from his willingness to work in Silverwood and to care for the students there because it meant he deviated from the "norm" of white disdain for the community. Although Edward came from a background of race and class privilege, he was able to build positive relationships with his students by drawing upon his personal biography as someone who struggled to connect with school. He found great personal rewards from connecting with students who might have no other adult to turn to for their emotional needs, and from empowering students to gain insight into their selves, their community, and relationships between Bunker High and its social context. Edward found his work with students to be intensely fulfilling:

It adds meaning to my life that I otherwise wouldn't have had. And I see it a lot in my friends [who are successful musicians]. There's a real struggle for them to find meaning in their work and what they do... I can see how taxing it is on who they – on just their souls. They have a really hard time finding meaning in their work and what they do, and I don't... Most of the time the reward is there like every day... That reminder of this is why I do this. So it's definitely – and it's made me a lot less narcissistic, a lot less self-obsessed.

### **Claire Unger – "Pick up the trash that's in their paths"**

Claire Unger was a short, athletic blonde in her mid-30s with shoulder length hair and a quick laugh. There was an ironic edge to her voice when she talked, though she was not afraid to speak passionately about her teaching. While all teachers I interviewed at Prestige HS expressed a concern about reaching the "middle student," for Claire, reaching out to students who might otherwise be lost at the performance-focused school was a central focus of her work. She was excited to start teaching a new course in the fall that was specifically targeted toward these students. Claire had been given the leeway to design her own curriculum, which focused on world history and relationships between communities and the individual. She wanted to encourage students to "do this great introspective work that applies to their own lives" and to set up a classroom environment where students would have autonomy. She hoped the course would enable her students to "feel like they finally have a voice and that school has meaning."

Claire tried to impart her personal philosophy to students; the philosophy also succinctly captured her own motivation for teaching in Prestige. She told me:

The most tangible thing I rant about is that they should pick up the trash that's in their paths. Just to clean up the world and not say that it's somebody else's job.

This metaphor came from a literal experience with trash. When she was a student at community college, Claire was a member of the environmental club, which had

scheduled a beach cleanup day. Claire was frustrated that the club would drive half an hour to the beach when there was trash to clean up on the college campus. She said:

If you're going to clean something up, look closer to home. I got a group together to clean up the campus, and after that, I could not see trash without picking it up. You've got to be comfortable doing the right thing, even in front of other people. Just to be upstanding and to not take the easy way.

Claire's belief in looking "closer to home" allowed her to make a critical life decision only three years prior to our interview. At that time, she was finishing her Master's in a prestigious urban education program that focused on placing highly qualified teachers in schools serving low-income students. She had accepted a full time position at Clinton High School, a racially and socioeconomically diverse school in Los Angeles County where she had been a student teacher, when she received a call from Prestige High School offering her a position. Prestige HS was Claire's alma mater, and she and her husband lived in the area, but she still felt conflicted because she felt an obligation to Clinton High School and because she had grown up in poverty:

I identified with the struggles those kids were facing because I kind of lived that as my childhood, so that made it a tough decision not to work there. Because I felt I could do good things there too.

However, after consulting with a professor in her Master's program, Claire decided to teach at Prestige, believing that her personal experience as the excluded "middle student" at that school would allow her to connect with students who might otherwise feel lost. Claire's professor told her: "Its okay. Don't have that white guilt. Don't feel like you have to go to the underprivileged school, there's still a need at [Prestige]."

Claire Unger was unique among the teachers I interviewed at Prestige High School in a number of ways: she was an alumna of the school, her preparation was specifically targeted toward low-income students of color, and she had been raised in poverty. The daughter of a single mother who struggled with drug addiction and changed jobs frequently, Claire attended ten different schools and acted as a caretaker for her little sister before being taken in by her grandparents in Juniper when she was in eighth grade. As a student at Prestige High, Claire experienced the school as a "tight knit community" where anyone who had not grown up in the area was regarded as an "outsider" or as "weird fringe kids." Claire enjoyed high school though, weathering feelings of exclusion with a close group of friends who also entered the school in eighth grade. She was a "middle student" at Prestige, neither high nor low-performing, and she did not go to college immediately after graduating, which was outside of the norm for Prestige.

Claire made the decision that she wanted to become a teacher when she was in the fourth grade. At that age, Claire "realized school was a safe space," and tried to spend as much time there as possible to escape her chaotic home life. She said:

I had an amazing 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. I remember everything: the entries she wrote back to me in my journals, the shoes she wore, the car she drove, everything about her stuck with me. I realized she was somebody I could trust. I didn't tell her everything, but I wrote stuff in my journal about things I was having problems with. She helped me. I was grading other kids' work in elementary school. I can't imagine a teacher doing that



unless they knew something was wrong at home and they were trying to help me.

Despite this childhood desire to become a teacher, Claire did not attend college right after high school. No one in her family had gone to college, so she never considered or discussed education beyond high school. She took a job at the local YMCA as a daycare aide and took child development classes at a community college to earn raises. After becoming the director of childcare at 21 and realizing that she would not advance further without a bachelor's degree, Claire began to think again about becoming a teacher, but it wasn't until a coworker dropped a CBEST study guide on her desk that she decided to quit her job and work as a nanny so she could focus on transferring to a four year college.

Claire's long-term goal was to teach in Juniper, where she and her husband lived with an elderly couple who had been her neighbors growing up. Claire had close ties to the city - her husband had been a teacher's aide in Juniper elementary schools and was an active participant in local civic life, and her family had lived in the city for four generations. Although Claire didn't "feel like a true Juniper person because I don't have the wealth," she "love[d] the community." Claire applied to teach at Prestige without expecting to be hired directly out of her master's program because of the school's rigorous academic requirements. Although she struggled with guilt about not taking the job offer from Clinton HS, in making her decision, she referred back to an argument she had in college. She had applied to the advanced program in teaching, and the interviewer for the program asked "so, you don't have any diversity in your background." This upset Claire:

I'm like, 'Oh, she means I haven't worked with Black children.' Like, that's what she was saying. And I snapped at her. I was like, Juniper has a lot of issues. You know, we have more emotional problems. Just because we don't have any 'diversity issues,' as you're calling them, doesn't mean we don't have huge problems with kids who are dealing with divorced families and custody struggles. I mean, we have kids who have anger issues and you can see the rage in their eyes, and they're going to want to do horrible things if nobody's there to give them support... I was just kind of outraged that just because I hadn't taught a certain group, I didn't know what the real world was like. And maybe Juniper is a bubble, I don't know, but I think there's still problems there, right? So I thought about that and I was like, okay, I was the middle child, I could actually go back here and do good work.

The year-long intensive program in urban education from which Claire earned her Master's degree instilled in its students the motto "be a change agent." Although the general focus of the program was on placing teachers in low-performing schools, by focusing on the needs that she could meet through her caring teaching practice "closer to home," Claire felt that she was able to be a change agent within Prestige High School. Claire described bringing unique perspectives from her own background that would allow her to reach students who otherwise would be "written off" at Prestige. Claire's younger sister had dropped out of Prestige HS in the ninth grade, and Claire wondered if her sister's life path might have been different if a teacher had reached out. As a younger teacher, Claire felt she had the technological savvy to connect with students through

multimedia and the Internet, and she wanted to enable other, older teachers to do the same. Finally, as a former student at Prestige and a former nanny for wealthy parents in the city, Claire felt that she was more attuned to the challenges confronting her students than were many other teachers.

One of the biggest problems confronting Prestige students was the school's "hidden drug problem." Claire told me that the drug problem "is not talked about, but it's really bad. The kids are idle, both parents are working, and the amount of drugs these kids have access to is so scary." When she was in high school, she knew girls who used cocaine to stay thin, and she believed that this was still common in the school. In her first year of teaching, a student of Claire's was arrested at school for heroin possession, and another had been arrested for selling drugs to 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. Claire had developed a personal relationship with the latter student whom she described as "the sweetest kid; he wrote about his life in his journal, and his mom was messed up like my mom. So we had that similarity and I could see that he was the kid I could have been."

Although Claire felt that her background was an asset in relating to students who struggled at Prestige, she did not always share about her life with students. Like other Prestige teachers, she was careful to gauge the level of trust she had built with a group of students before talking about her life. She said that there are things she won't share with students because "I don't want them to pity me," but although she was generally guarded the first semester, "if they ask questions" or if "a student wrote something where I feel like they might benefit from hearing" about her past, "I'll be honest with them for the most part." When she did feel comfortable sharing, however, Claire found it personally fulfilling to deepen her relationships with students:

I think there's times when I can share, and you can see that it makes a big difference in their lives. They know that I'm not faking it, that I actually do care. I take pride in coming from a divorced family because I can connect with all those kids that are feeling that pain. Having a hundred kids I can share that with is amazing. It kind of gives purpose to all the bad things that I went through that I could share it with somebody else and tell them that I really do understand.

Claire's choices of when and whether to share her personal stories with students involved a reciprocal process of trust-building. Claire needed to feel that she could trust a class or an individual student before sharing, but she also built trust with students through the caring act of telling her own story. Because such caring can take an emotional toll, Claire also placed limits on the relationships she developed with her students. For example, one student wrote very dark stories that hinted that he might have deep emotional problems. Claire referred this student to the counselor who recommended that he see a psychologist. She said, "that's a little bit of a burden sometimes when they get too personal." Likewise, although Claire was aware of drug and alcohol problems on campus, she preferred not to know first-hand which of her students were abusing substances:

I never chaperoned a dance my first year because I love having that perfect image of students inside the classroom. [When students asked her to chaperone, she responded] 'It'll ruin what I think of you.' And I always told the kids that. I finally chaperoned a dance, but I stayed outside the

whole time. One of my students got really drunk out of his mind, and he maybe had smoked some pot too. It was just so upsetting to see that.

Part of the reason Claire struggled with the awareness of her students' problems with drugs and alcohol is that she felt that she had little power to help them with this particular issue. She reported that campus security and drug dogs brought in from the outside were ineffective at finding drugs on campus and many parents were in denial about their children's substance abuse. Telling the story of a student who often came to class high on marijuana or drunk from cough syrup, she said:

The kids are telling me he's doing this and there's nothing I could do. I don't know how to help or stop or do anything. I just felt helpless. And that's just last year. There's stuff like that that happens every year. I feel like I don't have the tools or the training or anything. And I don't think the school even knows what to do besides having our community sheriff officer come on campus and have a presence.

Although it was difficult for Claire to support students on the issue of drugs and alcohol, she was most able to act as a "change agent" at the school through her support for alternatives to the status-based model of academic achievement at Prestige. Claire said that at Prestige:

The education means nothing. It's all a stepping stone to get to where they've been programmed to go. And they don't know why. I love asking them why they are working so hard because they don't know. Kids who do know are like, 'so I can go to college.' Why do you need to go to college? 'So I can get a good job.' Why do you need a good job? 'So I can have money.' Well, why do you need money? 'So I can be happy.' I mean, that's their train of thought. They don't realize how relative it is. If you want to be a teacher, you make it work. Your budget changes. But there is no way they can understand that concept. That's the most painful thing. You have to fight against kids who are going to cheat to get the A.

Although Claire had trouble convincing her honors students on this point, she provided "middle students" with an alternate system of value through which they could measure their accomplishments as students and envision themselves as having a productive future:

To say that I've gone to a JC [junior college], to a state school [for her B.A.], and to a private school [for her M.A.], it really helps them. Because many of them think that they've screwed up 9<sup>th</sup> grade, so they can't go to a good school. I tell them about the transfer program, and I don't know if anybody else would take the time to tell them that because they are already off the radar.

In addition to letting her students know that it was possible to be successful in life without achieving top grades throughout high school, she also hoped to instill in them the same values that motivated her own drive to teach at Prestige. As an undergraduate, Claire had been inspired by a professor who told the class that teachers should ask themselves how they can change the world through their work. As she reflected upon this:

I realized that the world doesn't have to be the globe - your world can be your classroom, your community, your family. So I try to teach that to the

students. Looking at the world through somebody else's eyes and having that understanding of compassion. So hopefully bringing that to the students that not only can they get rid of that sense of helplessness of what can they do to change the world – it doesn't have to be the world. The world is relative. Just choose the size of their globe. Prestige has amazing students who are starting clubs that are changing the world. Making a big impact. One club called Happily Ever After that collected 4000 books last year - some they're sending to Africa, some they're sending to South Central. And they're building libraries. That's amazing. Just trying to further that and help them come up with ideas of how to do that is one of my goals.

For Claire, choosing the size of her globe to fit Prestige allowed her to draw personal fulfillment from helping children who, though economically and racially privileged, faced life challenges at home and struggled to find ways to fit in at school. Claire also saw her work as socially positive on a larger scale by nurturing students who would also work to “change the world.” Choosing Prestige as her place to “be a change agent” also provided Claire with a sense of comfort and belonging in the community that served as a haven from her difficult childhood:

I know so many people in the town from living here and working at the 'Y.' It's so fun when you see the kids at the grocery store. I love being part of the community that I teach in and live in. It's a great place, despite some of the issues. It's nice and safe and like home for me. So now I feel at home at school and at home.

### **Brenda Cox –“You Really Feel What It's Like to Be Alive”**

I began my interview with Brenda Cox, an African American woman in her early 60s with short, salt-and-pepper hair, freckles, and a wide smile, at a trendy Los Angeles café. Sitting out on the exposed patio, Brenda at first was reserved with her responses, declining a question about the school board with “that's a question I don't want to answer; the politics of teaching,” before trailing off. Thanks to troubles with LA parking, however, after 40 minutes we decided to move to Brenda's home, a beautiful house nestled in the hills with clear views of the city, an open floor plan, and clean, minimalist decorating. In her own element, Brenda opened up about the deep fulfillment she gained from teaching:

I love teenagers. I love the potential, I love the growth, I love them coming back. Because you see them – [*exasperated sigh*] they just get on your last nerve, but you know the potential that they all have, and then getting them to recognize it, it's just the best. There's no greater feeling than that. The little small victories that you get. That's the best way to describe it. In my room, over the years I've had my students bring back pennants from their different colleges... And it's the strangest thing, they always come back when I'm just like, I can't take it – something's happened that day, this lesson plan's failed. I'm like, okay, it's time to retire, Brenda. You've lost it. This is it. And then one of them knocks on the door. And you just go, 'this is why I do it.' [*tears come to her eyes*]. And it brings the tears, 'cause it's just – it's just so nice to do something

that you really feel what it's like to be alive. I feel like that about teaching.

For Brenda, teaching was a lifelong “passion” inspired by her family. Brenda's aunt had been a teacher, and her father, a judge who had grown up in poverty in rural Louisiana, “always stressed education, education, education.” Because of this, she “always wanted to teach,” and hoped one day to open her own school. Brenda was “sidetracked” in college, however, by a love for interior design. After college, she attended design school and worked in the industry, even owning her own company for almost a decade before becoming a teacher. She said, “I had two passions, I wanted to teach and I wanted to do design. So I was able to get the design out of my system before I started teaching”

Over two decades of teaching high school English, Brenda was rewarded by emotional relationships with her students and by the knowledge that she was influencing the trajectories of students who might not otherwise have opportunities for economic and social mobility. In doing so, she was supported by a team of teachers at Unity High School who worked together to “take the kid to a whole new level.” In staff meetings, Unity teachers would discuss, “How do you bring relevancy to the curriculum and still engage students? How do you provide what is necessary for their academic development but also their development as people?” This communal project of investment in the development of others resonated with Brenda's spiritual practice as well. She said that she and her fellow teachers have conversations where they ask:

What do we do to keep [students] interested? To let them know they can do it? How do we address *all* their problems? *[laughs]* Yeah, I love it. It's great. And also because it goes along with - I practice Buddhism. And the whole premise behind my practice of Buddhism is world peace. And it's by people working together, unifying. For everyone to be happy. Not temporary surface kind of happiness, but what is really getting to your particular heart. So this whole experience has allowed me to see how much work it takes but at the same time, how successful it can be.

Through her Buddhist practice, Brenda consciously constructed teaching as a project of personal growth through relationships with other teachers and with students. Caring, reciprocal relationships were both an idealized goal (world peace achieved through individuals unifying for mutual happiness) and the mode through which Brenda understood and developed her self. For Brenda, teaching “continually makes me self-reflect” so that over time, she “strengthened her resolve never to give up.” Regarding her project of self-reflection and growth through teaching, Brenda told me:

When you [ask how teaching has affected] me as a person, it's all of this, so it's coming from family, it's coming from religion, it's coming from my experience in the classroom, the academies. All of these make me really enjoy this life. The challenges of it... I think the growth I've gone through is to realize that peace comes from how you respond to challenge, and that's what education has done for me. Being a teacher means that I get to marvel at how I respond to everyday challenges being in the classroom... It's like your own personal mirror. ‘Hmmm, okay, I need to tweak this and do this.’

In addition to acting as a mirror for self-reflection and growth, the relationships Brenda developed with her students through her teaching provided immense personal satisfaction. Throughout her twenty years of teaching at Unity, Brenda developed many close relationships with students in the classroom, and some of these had spilled outside of school boundaries, blurring her personal life and her school life. Her daughter's school friend who had a difficult family history lived with Brenda and her family throughout her late teens and early twenties, and went on to become a lawyer; a former student who regularly used to visit Brenda at home proposed to his girlfriend on the deck of her house, and his daughter now attended Unity High School; Brenda once took her daughter on a field trip with her students, and the daughter hit it off with one of the boys, whom she later married. Brenda had to negotiate "how do you go from Mrs. Cox to Mom? How do you start wearing your pajamas in front of your student that you've known for three years? But he's been the best."

Brenda personalized her relationships with students in the classroom depending on the perceived individual needs of each student. Some students required a strict approach while others needed more empathy, depending on their personalities and their life circumstances. She said, "it's really a matter of having one-on-one [relationships]. I have different relationships with different kids." In addition to tailoring her approach to different individuals, Brenda's emotional relationships with her students changed over time due to shifts in her own subjectivity in relation to age:

When I first started teaching, I was 40, and they would ask me to the prom... Then the older you get, then you're referred to as Mom. 'Oh you talk just like my mom,' or 'you're saying what my mom says.' So you're no longer asked to the prom, but now you've become Mom... So the interaction becomes a little more personal. And they are able, when they're hurting, they share with you more. Recently I had the experience of a student who told me 'Oh, Sam [another student] just paid you the biggest compliment. He goes around telling everyone you're his grandmother.' To him, it was a term of endearment... The interaction changes as we change and as we grow.

Brenda's personal biography was bound up not only with her love for teaching and for her students, but with the specific satisfaction she gained with working at a place like Unity. A self-described "quasi-militant" and "Miss Black Power" in college, Brenda realized her political project of empowering low-income, racially stigmatized youth through her teaching. She coordinated Unity's AVID<sup>27</sup> program, a program "started almost 30 years ago in San Diego during the time period of white flight. One teacher stood up and decided that she wasn't going to flee to the new high school," but instead started a program to provide educational support for students who were bused in.

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<sup>27</sup> "AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, is a college readiness system for elementary through postsecondary levels that is designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. The AVID College Readiness System (ACRS) accelerates student learning, uses research based methods of effective instruction, provides meaningful and motivational professional development, and acts as a catalyst for systemic reform and change." See <http://www.avid.org/>

Although AVID was designed in 1980 to address a bias that asserted that busing students of color would cause the quality of predominantly white schools to deteriorate, Brenda saw that a similar chauvinism continued among many privileged Amapola residents. She said she sometimes dealt with snide comments about her choice to teach at Unity:

But it's about who you are and how you look at it and if kids are kids. Who are you saying 'Oh my god?' Are you saying that because the kids are brown? I mean, what are you really saying?... And [the stigmatization of Unity High School is] unfortunate, but, you know, racism is rampant.

The rampant racism that Brenda perceived in American society in general and in Amapola in particular impinged upon her students in specific, personal ways. Like other Unity teachers, Brenda felt that Unity was stigmatized as the "black sheep of the community" and the "school you don't want your kids to go to." She described the "melee" incident discussed in Chapter 3 as an overreaction by the police and a misrepresentation by the newspaper, which had an agenda against the school. Brenda believed that this active stigmatization of the school and of racial-ethnic minority students had profound psychological consequences for students of color:

I'm talking very heavily on belief. That if you believe that you're supposed to do something, it's a lot easier than if you don't believe it and nobody in your environment believes it... Entitlement comes with being white. It does. In that you just kind of accept things. I have a niece that was adopted [who appears white]. So her... vision is different. Because the environment responds to her differently. So there is a very subtle, I don't even want to call it damaging, but there's damage done to people of color that is not something that is real obvious. Because the belief system is so ingrained that you're good, but you're not *that* good... That's a belief system, and belief is energy that you're constantly bombarded by over and over.

Brenda's great challenge in her work was to fight against the psychological damage inflicted upon her students by both direct instances of racism through stigmatization of the school and by a broader belief system. Although this was difficult work, Brenda also took great joy from helping her students find self-confidence and grow on a path toward further educational success. She was not only interested in her students' educational and career attainment, however. She also hoped to develop students who would engage in caring projects of self as they matured. When I asked her what contribution she makes to society, Brenda said:

I think that I am a part of, I don't want to say that I am alone doing this, but I think that I am helping to develop capable people. I try my best to develop students and people that are lifelong learners and they want to contribute. That they see the value in community service and they see the value in diversity. The necessity of global thinking.

By teaching students who suffered psychological "damage" inflicted by a racist society to value "community service" and "diversity," Brenda saw herself as engaged in a project of care that involved her own self but also extended to future generations. Through teaching, she established a legacy of social justice that was tied to a vision of "world peace" rooted in relations of care. This legacy was captured in the poem Brenda

asked me to read at the end of our interview, paraphrased from Chilean educator and feminist Gabriela Mistral:

*Teacher's Prayer*

*Let me be more mother than the mother herself  
In my love and defense of the child who is not flesh of my flesh*

*Help me to make one of my children my most perfect poem  
And leave within him or her my most melodious melody  
From that day when my own lips no longer sing*

*With this same spirit*

*Let us care for and nurture young people*

### **Conclusion**

The three narratives presented here all followed a similar structure, incorporating a personal past that contributed to the moral values that motivated teachers; the ways in which their current care for their students allowed them to reflect and grow; and the orientation of their work toward the ongoing personal development of their students. This development was not limited to academic growth; each teacher upheld the value of care and wished to develop compassion in their students as well as their selves. Common to these interviews was the way in which care emerged as both a moral ideal and a way of working on the self, others, and society. However, variations in the contexts of care – in both organizational difference and student needs – also led teachers to engage in distinctive modes of care and to envision the social change created by their work in different ways.

Edward Shaw chose to work at Bunker High School because it was the place where he identified the greatest need among students. Though Edward was raised with race and class privilege, he also experienced school from a position of alienation. Edward used this alienated past to connect with his students, just as he used a sense of his own toughness to identify positively with a chaotic school environment where he sometimes clashed with other teachers. Despite a general lack of resources, Edward took advantage of opportunities to help his students on a path to mobility (by spending weeks with them at a college program in the summer), to meet their physical and emotional needs (by caring for the student who had been kicked out of her home) and to help his students build community (by sharing their struggles and envisioning a better future).

Claire Unger had also experienced a sense of alienation as a high schooler. As an alumna of Prestige who grew up in poverty, Claire felt personally equipped to help students who might feel socially isolated in Juniper and to reach out to the “middle student.” This particular experience explained Claire’s choice to work at Prestige rather than a school with a disadvantaged student population despite attending a Master’s program designed to place highly qualified teachers in schools with low-income, Black and Latino students – she went to the school where she could readily identify a need that she knew how to fill. Claire’s teaching was focused around creating positive school experiences for students she saw as needing care in the community where she felt “safe” and “at home,” and helping these students to take responsibility in their communities as well.



Brenda Cox became a teacher because of the emphasis placed on education as the route to mobility in a family that experienced the obstacles of poverty and racism in the pre-Civil Rights South. Brenda chose to teach at Unity High because of her desire to help students overcome the self-doubt that came with racialized stigma and to balance out an uneven playing field shaped by white entitlement. Thus, she was deeply invested in providing for the emotional and psychological needs of her students, which she perceived as prerequisites to academic achievement. In the context of her work at Unity High School, Brenda developed deep connections with individual students while sustaining broader programs like AVID that would support the growth of many. As a Buddhist, Brenda integrated her spiritual practice with her care, so that the challenges of teaching were understood as opportunities for personal growth and social justice was viewed as a deep, moral imperative.

The narratives presented in this chapter illustrate a number of themes raised in Chapter Five. All three teachers invested their own emotions and selves in improving the welfare of their students, reaping psychic rewards from practices of care. These three narratives also illustrate distinctive contours of care in each of the three schools. The chaotic environment of Bunker presented challenges to and provided motivation for Edward's efforts to care for his students. Despite his devotion to student welfare, he was not exempt from the toxic faculty culture at Bunker, sometimes clashing with other teachers and enabling his friend to shirk his job duties by fraudulently clocking him out at the end of the day. Limitations on teachers' power in Prestige made it difficult for Claire to attend to some of her students' needs, and she also described intentionally limiting her care and her knowledge of student problems to avoid emotional tolls. Brenda perceived her care as supplementing and enhanced by the dynamics of Unity High School as an institution, and she took a defensive pride in the school's underdog status caused by historical and current racism.

In addition to illustrating these themes, these particular narratives provide insight into why deep inequalities persist across schools despite the hard work of "caring" teachers. Edward's narrative describes the resistance of other teachers to even consider teaching in a community like Silverwood. Claire Unger carefully weighed her decision to teach at Prestige when she was enrolled in a program explicitly designed to prepare teachers for work with low-income racial-ethnic minority students; however, she ultimately dismissed any compunctions she had as "white guilt." Her personal narrative suggested that fulfilling the needs of students marginalized because of their academic performance at Prestige High was the moral equivalent of fulfilling needs caused by institutionally entrenched inequities by racial-ethnicity and class.

These teachers tried to cultivate compassion in their students and hoped that the work of teaching would make the world a better place; and to varying extents, they accomplish some of these goals. By cultivating personal relationships with their students, teachers can inspire and encourage students to acknowledge their own potential and to reflect on their own contributions to a community. However, the work of teaching is also isolated within particular school contexts. A common complaint throughout my interviews was that teachers had almost no opportunities to collaborate and learn across schools within these suburban districts, let alone across districts to schools with widely different demographics.

Because teachers are focused on meeting the immediate needs of the students they care for and care deeply about on a day-to-day basis, it can be difficult to conceive of the needs of entire populations of youth. Brenda Cox and Edward Shaw were focused on building up the pride of students of color in the face of psychologically damaging acts of racism, but Claire took no action to mitigate the entitlement of her white students. Claire spoke proudly of Prestige students collecting books to donate to students in South Central Los Angeles (a primarily low-income, African American and Latino community) – an ironic reflection of Juniper families’ ability to feel magnanimous about sharing a small portion of the resources that they had preserved for themselves through the cultivation of quarantined disadvantage.

Just as it is important to avoid vilifying teachers who become burnt out and disheartened while caring in schools with vast needs and few resources to meet them, it is also important to understand that teachers alone cannot be the “heroes” in a narrative of social change. Indeed, by cultivating deep personal relationships with students, Brenda Cox and Edward Shaw helped move students along pathways of mobility, but these pathways, and the number of students that might travel them, were limited by social forces beyond teachers’ control. In an example provided by Edward, a large group of privileged, white college students at a top university held a social event where the theme was a racist depiction of the Silverwood community. Bunker students organized a letter asserting their own dignity in response, and as amends, a small number of students were offered the opportunity to participate in a summer program in science. In the first year of the program, the students involved in writing the letter attended the camp; in the second year, Edward and a science teacher were careful to bring only students who were academically prepared for the rigorous science program because their students had felt overwhelmed and ashamed the year before. Is this social justice, or a begrudging parceling out of resources within a larger system of racism and class inequality that sustains conditions of quarantined disadvantage?

Many teachers work hard to cultivate a caring self that can sustain the intense emotional demands and rewards of acknowledging and working to meet the needs of students they see every day within their school contexts. The three teachers I have described each exemplify teachers’ experiences of and efforts to work on their selves at each of the schools. However, in order to support all students, nurturing equity among young people, there needs to be systematic social and institutional change.” Rather than preserving resources for children we view as our own, we must ask for the strength “*to be more mother than the mother herself in our love and defense of the child who is not flesh of our flesh.*” It is imperative that we begin the hard work of breaking down the vast inequalities of resources and needs that exist across schools so that we can truly *care for and nurture* all young people.

## **Chapter 7:**

### **Institutionally Appropriate Families or Community-Appropriate Institutions?**

*I think economics definitely plays a part wherever you are, and parental involvement really is a main factor in how kids [perform at school]. So I have a problem with the LA Times for targeting teachers [by publishing their value-added scores by name] because although there is some validity to showing how kids are doing by test scores, that's not the whole story. It really is how much motivation the kids themselves have and what support they're getting at home. [Mimicking an appropriate conversation between a parent and a child] "Do you have homework?" "Yeah, I do." "Well, let me see it."*

- Forest Lasky, Prestige Spanish Teacher

Teachers working under current conditions of segregated public schooling are well aware of the vast differences that exist among schools. In 2010, heightened attention was brought to these differences following the *Los Angeles Times*' controversial publication of value-added<sup>28</sup> scores linked to teachers' names in 470 Los Angeles Unified School District elementary schools. Area teachers reacted with shock and anger, and many journalists noted that some of the highest scores went to teachers in schools with populations that were advantaged by racial-ethnicity and class while the lower scores seemed to concentrate in schools with populations that were low-income, and Black and Latino. The reaction to the publication of these scores reached an emotional peak in late September of 2010, when it was announced that fifth-grade teacher Rigoberto Ruelas committed suicide. Though Ruelas did not leave a suicide note, family and friends reported that he was despondent after receiving a "less effective" rating from the *LA Times*. Ruelas had worked for 14 years, with near-perfect attendance, at Miramonte Elementary School, which served a high-poverty Latino student population. The *Times* article reporting his death noted that Ruelas was "a teacher in an impoverished, gang-ridden area of South Los Angeles, [who] always reached out to the toughest kids. He would tutor them on weekends and after school, visit their homes, encourage them to aim high and go to college."

For many teachers in Los Angeles area schools, the death of Ruelas was symbolic of something they had felt for quite some time, even before the publication of value-added scores: In the media, in politics, and even within districts and schools, teachers were scapegoated for persistent gaps in students' school performance based on racial-ethnicity and class. This scapegoating was at least in part tied to No Child Left Behind and its imperative to reduce these gaps through an emphasis on standardized testing. Teachers like Ruelas, whose students faced challenges that extended well beyond the school walls and whose remedy was beyond the efforts of any one teacher, likely felt this

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<sup>28</sup> Value added scores are estimated by projecting a students' current-year test scores based on growth in test scores in previous years. Teachers achieve a higher value-added score when students exceed this projection while in their classroom. The estimate used by the LA Times adjust for some student-level factors (such as gender, poverty, and parent education level) and peer effects, but does not adjust for race/ethnicity or for special education status because these data were withheld by the district. Data for the times estimate were obtained directly from Los Angeles Unified School District.

scapegoating most acutely. However, teachers across school types rankled at the implementation of a sweeping policy that emphasized testing over all other forms of student evaluation and the implication that teachers were to blame for low scores.

As high school teachers in small, suburban districts, my interviewees were not directly affected by the *Times*' actions. However, teachers in all three schools I studied were upset by the release of the value added scores. They were offended by the notion that their work could be accurately captured through standardized tests and by the assumption that teachers could control the many factors involved in creating unequal schooling outcomes. As Unity special education teacher Hazel Tarver put it, "Teachers are not trying to leave a child behind. But to tax us down to the point where teachers are just teaching to the test – that should be done away with. I mean, testing has become big business, and that isn't beneficial to students. Because they're not learning." As I discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the teachers I interviewed made immense investments of care in their students because they were concerned with the personal development of young people, which included their academic growth. Test-based evaluations of teacher performance were incapable of validating these investments because they were not a holistic measure of student growth.

In addition to frustrations with the limitations of standardized testing, teachers resented the implication that they were "trying to leave a child behind," as Hazel put it. Teachers I interviewed believed that they were working hard to educate their students, but that many factors beyond their control limited their ability to provide students with opportunities for upward mobility through academic achievement. This was especially true of teachers at Unity and Bunker, but Prestige teachers also recognized that multiple factors contributed to the "gap" between Prestige students and their peers in low-income, Black and Latino schools. In the quote that opened this chapter, Forest Lasky named the factor that teachers were most likely to cite as they provided alternative (to blaming teachers) explanations for the achievement gap: Parents. More specifically, teachers often made connections between family socioeconomic status, parental support for students' academic progress, and student motivation at school.

In this chapter, I explore how the teachers I interviewed understood unequal outcomes across schools and how the barriers they saw to promoting the welfare of their own and "other people's" students (Delpit 2006). In my interviews, I found that teachers who were subjected to blame for persistent achievement gaps by racial-ethnicity and class often attributed the failure of schooling to promote equal opportunity to another key group – parents. Previous research has shown that teachers may use racial-ethnicity and class stereotypes of parents and students' home lives to explain trouble with students, such as African American boys' perceived bad behavior (Ferguson 2000). Along these same lines, teachers may tend to perceive low-income parents as apathetic toward schooling (Lott 2001) while appreciating the communication styles and extracurricular supports particular to middle and upper class parents (Lareau 1987). Many of my interviewee's statements resonate with these patterns, locating families as a source of problems for the work of teaching in ways that sometimes echoed stereotypes based on racial-ethnicity and class. However, this chapter moves beyond earlier literature by identifying structural mechanisms through which teachers come to articulate such stereotyped views. This chapter addresses the question: how is it that caring teachers

who rankle at scapegoating come to assign similar blame to parents, another group of adults who are supposed to provide youth with care?

In my interviews at Unity, Bunker, and Prestige High Schools, teachers often referred to students' families as a source of trouble. Across contexts, teachers described parents who provided insufficient supports for schooling as the cause of students' poor classroom behavior or school performance. Teachers' explanations for this insufficient family support varied across school settings in ways that were closely related to family racial-ethnicity and class. In addition, teachers at Prestige, the school serving white, economically privileged students, faced personal conflicts with parents that they attributed to parental entitlement. Instead of entitlement, teachers at Bunker and Unity reported frustration with parent priorities that differed from school priorities; these teachers desired greater contact with parents.

These differences across school types explain and provide empirical depth to the ideas advanced by previous literature. Making comparisons across three low-income and high-income contexts, I found that teachers' frustrations with students' families were rooted in the structure of schooling. Schools require that families fill a number of prerequisite functions in order for teachers to successfully accomplish the work of contributing to students' personal and academic growth. When these prerequisites were not fulfilled, teachers felt unsupported in their efforts to provide for students. In explaining particular ways in which families failed to fulfill schools' expectations of *institutionally appropriate families*, teachers in these segregated schools often referred to parents' perceived racial-ethnic characteristics and their class status.

Teachers easily vented their workplace frustrations against the target of supposed parental failings; however, the same teachers also provided sophisticated critiques of institutional inequality. Unity and Bunker teachers, especially, made important connections between social factors that inhibited their students' families from embodying the institutionally appropriate family type required by school. These teachers also offered nuanced critiques of institutional obstacles to parent participation in school and worked to ameliorate them by reaching out to parents. Because teachers at Unity and Bunker were more likely to engage in emotional relationships with students that sometimes extended to include parents, they were able to challenge the assumption that "school" and "family" are distinct child-rearing institutions.

The ways in which teachers understand their own role and that of the family in developing the child reveals much about schools as institutions – both about the assumed model of the family upon which the work of schooling is built, and about how institutional inequality is normalized in the lived experience of teachers. The problem of school inequality has diffuse boundaries, encompassing unequal relationships that extend beyond school walls to include families and neighborhoods. Narratives of educational inequality that blame teachers for persistent test score gaps rely on an understanding of the school as a discrete institution that is wholly separate from the conditions of local communities. Teachers at Bunker and Unity challenged this firm boundary between schools and their contexts, and the sanguine belief in schools as meritocratic institutions that promote the mobility intelligent and hardworking students.

### **Family Trouble**

To understand teachers' talk about families, it is first important to understand how students can generate trouble for teachers in the classroom. Students are not static

products to be labored upon, but human agents who participate in their own academic and personal growth. Thus, the work of teaching is never entirely under teachers' control, but requires the participation of students both individually and as a group. As identified by Willard Waller (1932), the main tasks of teaching are not, in fact, imparting information, but motivating students and maintaining order in the classroom. Students pose a source of trouble for teachers when they do not participate in these tasks – either by showing insufficient motivation to learn, or by disrupting the order of the room.

In some ways, these two tasks (motivating students and maintaining order) are skills that teachers developed over time through their classroom practice (Veenman 1984). They are also interconnected. A number of teachers I interviewed reported that the best way to “do classroom management” was to design lessons that were entertaining and engaging so that students were motivated to learn. However, teachers also believed that good pedagogy was not the sole determinant of student motivation; motivation was also intrinsic to the child. For example, Prestige Spanish teacher Forest Lasky told me: “My philosophy has always been: You have very little sway over your children. You really do... I maintain that the kid has to be motivated. I can do that [provide motivating lessons], but still, they have to bring something to the table.”

Teachers explained students' intrinsic motivation on two levels – the individual and the social. On the individual level, teachers believed that some students had a natural curiosity that was related to their unique personalities. For example, Unity English teacher Vernon Griffith told me that he was “blessed” to be born with an “innate” love of learning that came naturally to him and to some of his students. Others, he said, had to practice studying and questioning until it became second nature. On the social level, teachers believed that students were influenced by their social situation to value education and embrace school requirements or to be disinterested or even resentful of schooling. Social influences on students included both peers and family members.

Teachers I interviewed did not connect an innate love of learning to racial-ethnicity or class background. In teachers' view, the intellectually curious personality type transcended social differences. However, teachers believed that the motivations students brought to school were shaped by *social* influences that were based on the racial-ethnic and socioeconomic background of the child. Will Armor, a Prestige history teacher, explained this view succinctly. Will had previously taught at Amapola High School, with a majority of low-income, African American and Latino students. I asked him to compare, compare his experiences at Amapola and Prestige. He responded:

You still have same challenge – trying to motivate kids. It's just a very different type of motivation... Here at Prestige, you have more kids that are talking to you about getting into Harvard or Stanford or things like this. It's an entitlement of 'I come from a position that's higher than yours as evidenced by the car that I'm driving that's way better than yours.' Whereas at [Amapola HS], I had a hard time motivating kids. There were a lot of kids who just went, 'This is it for me, I'm going from here to [community college] no matter what.' So motivating that kid that what happened in America in the 1700s really matters - well, no it doesn't. It's hard to come up with practical argument. The similarity is the [challenge of] motivation, but the type of motivation is very different.

This same juxtaposition was also raised by Prestige science teacher Vanessa Farris, who had previously taught at a private Catholic school serving an economically diverse student body. Vanessa found that it was difficult to motivate students at Prestige who believed that their university professor and research scientist parents had more to offer educationally than their own teachers. In contrast, she had struggled in her previous school to make her students feel that schooling was relevant to their personal outcomes. Thus, according to Vanessa and Will, the challenge to motivating Prestige students was that some were so assured of their own trajectories into top universities that they felt entitled to choose whether to engage with certain teachers, courses, or material. In contrast, the challenge to motivating students in low-income, majority non-white schools was that some students were so assured that the trajectory of top university attendance was foreclosed to them that they did not see secondary schooling as worth their effort.

These explanations for student motivation are fundamentally related to the class structure in the US, including differential patterning of opportunities, and to students' perceptions of the relationship between schooling and class structure. Indeed, many teachers offered nuanced critiques of schooling and the opportunity structure in relation to racial-ethnicity and class. However, before discussing these critiques, it is also important to present teachers' explanations for student motivation that drew upon perceptions of families, both to complicate the literature critiquing teachers who articulate a discourse of "cultural deprivation," and to better understand the fuzzy boundaries between school and family that help sustain inequality. By comparing teachers descriptions' of families across school types (i.e., high-income and low-income), the following sections point to the kind of family support that they assumed to be appropriate to schooling as an institution and how they explained deviations from this kind of family support in racial-ethnic and class-inflected terms.

### **Trouble with High-Income Parents**

As explored in previous chapters, Prestige teachers felt that they had limited ability to intervene in their students' lives, but that did not prevent them from worrying about conditions their students faced at home. Teachers described numerous sources of trouble at home that might affect students' emotional health and school performance. Chief among these were concerns about divorce. Teachers worried that divorcing parents could cause turmoil in their students lives through nasty custody battles, and that the process of divorce could cause depression in children. They also felt that students who divided their time between homes might have trouble keeping track of school assignments.

A second concern that teachers expressed was that Prestige parents might be affected by alcoholism, which was presumed to have negative effects on students as well. Prestige teachers did not mention any other kinds of substance problems with parents, though they also worried about parental permissiveness with teenagers' drug and alcohol use. This concern with permissiveness was connected to a third source of trouble – teachers felt that some Prestige parents spent too much time away from their children at work. Thus, teachers worried that some students had access to resources that could get them into trouble and lacked the proper supervision and guidance to manage these resources. Conversely, they also worried that some parents were too intensely involved with their children's school performance, putting pressure on them to look attractive, to get high grades and to earn admission to top universities as markers of family status

within the community. These problems of pressure and absenteeism could even combine in one family. Will Armor put it this way:

It's almost like a false accountability, I think, where the kids are expected to achieve a high standard but not given a lot of support in those areas. I have a lot of kids with absentee parents who work all the time. They're expected to achieve at this level but they're not given any guidance on how to do that.

Prestige teachers believed that such pressure resulted in student stress, eating disorders, and incidents of cheating at school. For example, science teacher Vanessa Farris told me that her students faced "too much pressure. From themselves, from their parents, from the community. I've had students crying or their parents crying because their kid was going to a good UC instead of a top private university."

Regarding their own interactions with students' families, Prestige teachers' biggest complaint was demanding parents. They were upset by parents who wanted them to change students' grades or who felt they knew better how to teach the material. Teachers kept material evidence of conflicts with parents: Lucy Monahan reported having a 26-page booklet of class rules to deal with the demands of lawyer parents, Cynthia Hume had a computer file of 180 emails from one parent over the course of a school year, and Gene Buckland showed me a folder full of irate parent emails. In addition to entitlement posing a challenge to teachers' authority in their classroom, however, teachers also reported this entitlement as a type of moral failing. They felt that parents weren't teaching students to love education for the sake of learning, but as a means to enhance their social status. In this sense, parents' goals of securing economic success for their children by promoting school performance sometimes conflicted with teachers' goals of promoting their students' personal development, as math teacher Gene Buckland stated:

I just really hope I'm putting out honest individuals that are going to contribute to society. I'm not going to give those negative energies out there... Sometimes I feel that these parents have a different view. I mean, if you can cheat and get away with it, great. But I'm trying to teach the opposite. So I hope we're putting out good individuals. As opposed to – you know, the last thing I want to see is a former student behind bars because they did something unethical.

The "trouble" caused by parents at Prestige, then, was primarily related to a lack of clarity over *who* was responsible for students personal development and *what goals* they were developing toward. Prestige parents who failed to cede authority to the teacher to teach students as they saw fit and who valued school for a different reason than teachers (especially valuing social status and economic advancement over a love of learning and moral development) were seen as posing a problem for teachers' work. Other problems were also caused by parents who might distract their students, tax them emotionally, or fail to provide sufficient motivation due to personal situations of divorce, alcoholism, or busy work schedules. However, Prestige teachers also believed that challenges related to insufficient motivation were less of a problem in their school than they might be in a lower-income environment. Continuing the discussion of motivation that opened this chapter, Forest Lasky put it this way:



I would rather have the parents too hands on than not be able to reach them at all, like I know happens at some poor schools – because the parent’s always working or they’re strung out on drugs or alcohol. So I think its great to have parental involvement and I think that's a real strength because they are at the worst pushy, and at best, a motivating force.

### **Trouble with Low-Income Parents**

There was a stark contrast between the racial-ethnic and class-coded terms that teachers used to describe family trouble at Prestige and the problems raised by teachers at Bunker and Unity. Whereas Prestige teachers frequently raised “divorce” as a source of emotional turmoil, teachers at Bunker or Unity rarely mentioned the process of divorce as a source of problems. Instead, teachers at the low-income schools talked about the problem of unstable family structure and absent fathers, especially when referring to African American students. Likewise, teachers at Bunker and Unity saw parent alcoholism as a source of trouble for their students, but they also mentioned that parents might also have addictions to drugs as well, or be involved in gangs. Finally, whereas teachers at Prestige worried that parents might be absent from home due to working at high-powered jobs, Unity and Bunker teachers worried that parents were absent because they had to work multiple low-wage jobs to make ends meet. Bunker science teacher Donna Francis felt that without parental guidance, students would have fewer incentives to stay focused in school:

They have socioeconomic issues at home that make it really difficult. Not just them – it’s generational. It's a trickle down thing, it’s not just the kid. They’re dealing with their whole family issue or their background. Or my Mom and Dad are in jail, so I’m in a foster home. That kind of a thing. And then the other thing is my Mom and Dad don't speak English, so they don't know if I’m in school or not. They send me off to school in the morning because they know it’s right but they don't know what I’m doing in school because they don't speak English. So I can pretty much get away with anything.

Teachers in the low-income schools I studied also mentioned sources of trouble that did not appear in my interviews with Prestige teachers. They linked parental absence not only to work but also to migration, imprisonment, and gang involvement. These teachers did not worry that children were left alone at home with time and resources on their hands that might get them into trouble; instead, they worried that their students took on too many responsibilities that interfered with school work, such as paid work or providing child care for siblings. Teachers at Unity and Bunker also saw student transience as a problem that interfered with school and viewed group homes and foster placements as providing insufficient support for students’ academic and personal needs. Even when parents were home, teachers worried that the home environment was not conducive to learning, either because parents lacked the financial resources to provide students with a quiet space to do work or because they lacked the cultural, linguistic, and educational resources to supplement schooling with school-like activities (such as attending museums or aquariums) or to navigate the school system.

At times, teachers discussed these problems by drawing upon discourses of “cultural deprivation” (Lipton 1962) and a “culture of poverty” (Lewis 1975) that assign

blame for the challenges faced by low-income families directly to parents. That is, teachers sometimes described these sources of trouble as stemming from parents' personal or moral failings. For example, Russell Pratt, who taught English and drama at Bunker, expressed frustration with students he viewed as unmotivated. He said that some of his students would sit in a chair, arms folded and not working, because they didn't have a pencil. He characterized this as "passive aggressive" behavior born out of a "welfare mentality." He continued, "I call it a welfare mentality because I believe it is born out of a lifetime of being trained [that] I'll wait for the check to come in the mail or I'll sit here until someone helps me."

Other teachers made similar statements when referring to parents who accept welfare. Echoing a stereotype popularized by President Ronald Reagan of "welfare queens" who are lazy and more interested in collecting a check than in the well-being of their students, teachers suggested that mothers who collected welfare were not motivated to support their children's education. For example, Bunker math teacher Jason Trice told me, "the way it works is if your kid is designated special ed., you get more welfare, so all these welfare bunnies [are] pushing their little normal babies into the special ed. program." In a more nuanced discussion, Bunker science teacher Donna Francis told me that different families have different ways of relating to welfare assistance, which in turn affects the type of support these families offer for their students' education:

One [type of family] is like, 'Well, this is assistance, so I'm using it as assistance, but you still have to follow through,' and there's still that family support there sometimes. Whereas [for other families], it's like, 'you need to go get you a check.' And you know, that's not all cases and scenarios, but it happens.

The more nuanced discussion provided by Donna Francis refers us back to the purpose of teachers' discussions of families' presumed failings. Teachers worked to make sense of why some students appeared motivated and driven while others were distracted and unable to engage with the school material. Though teachers felt responsible for helping their students achieve school success, they also worried that their efforts might be stymied by outside factors. Teachers felt that to successfully develop their students, they required support from other adults who cared for these children as well – their parents and families. In all three schools I studied, when teachers encountered trouble with students that stemmed from a perceived lack of motivation, they looked to parents as their partners in the job of rearing and educating children to explain this trouble. For example, Bunker English teacher Victoria Scott said:

I feel like as a parent, I allow the schools to teach my children. I have every right to know what's going on and I'm going to make sure that I do. At the same time, while I'm allowing them to teach my kids, I have a great deal of responsibility for what my kids do. I'm responsible for their homework, their behavior, what they're learning, or to bring in some supplemental education – to take them to a museum, or go to a play, or buy a new book. It's my job as a parent.

### **Institutionally Appropriate Families**

Setting aside for a moment the racial-ethnic and class inflections of teachers' complaints to focus on commonalities across schools, it is evident that the work of teaching is predicated upon certain assumptions about the "job" of the parent. In the

quote above, Victoria Scott made explicit the expectation that the family as an institution should work in tandem with schools to support their mission to develop students in a particular way. This expectation emerges because teachers are “doubly dependent” on parents to both respect their authority in the classroom and to influence their children to participate in school (Lortie 1975). This dependency creates particular expectations for parents among teachers. In his interviews with public school teachers, Dan Lortie (1975:191) found that, in teachers’ estimation, “the good parent” both “provides moral, physical, and emotional care for his children” and “takes his lead from the teacher.”

Moving away from Lortie’s concept of “the good parent”, I suggest that teachers’ statements about families were not necessarily predicated upon normative evaluations of “good” or “bad” parenting, but rather on school-based understandings of *institutionally appropriate families*. Although teachers sometimes framed parents’ failure to fulfill expectations for appropriate families as personal or moral failings, they also at times empathized with parents or explained family situations in terms of structural constraints, as I will describe further below. This renders the normative concept of “the good parent” inappropriate for describing the presumed functions of families on which teacher success was predicated. Instead, I coin the term “institutionally appropriate families” to point to the ways in which the structure of schooling, rather than individual teachers, generates expectations for families.

Moving from notions of “the good parent” to the concept of institutionally appropriate families allows for the inclusion of family composition, the nature of familial relationships, and families’ cultural, educational, and social capital alongside parenting behaviors. This concept suggests that teachers’ comments about families are not necessarily rooted in personal bias so much as in structural requirements. Historically, schooling has depended upon the work of the family to prepare children for formal education and to supplement the work of the school (Griffith and Smith 2005). When families do not meet the requirements of schooling, their children present educational *needs* that teachers must compensate for with their care.

Analyzing similarities in teachers’ descriptions of family trouble across socioeconomic backgrounds at all three schools reveals common characteristics that schools as institutions expect from *institutionally appropriate families*:

- First, students’ physical and emotional needs will be taken care of by the family outside of school. This means that appropriate families provide consistent shelter and food and ensure that children enter school physically and emotionally healthy and happy. This also means that children feel loved and safe with their family.
- Second, childhood is treated as a protected time (Zelizer 1985) where children do not worry about money, status, or parental relationships. In appropriate families, adults care for children; children do not care for parents even if they are ill, depressed, or addicted to substances. “Adult concerns” are kept separate from “children’s concerns.”
- Third, parents invest in their childrens’ development as *individuals*. Rather than achieving collective upward mobility as a family, parents will concern themselves with promoting the upward mobility of each of their children. In turn, children will not concern themselves with providing care to siblings or other family members and will invest heavily in their own economic success through schooling. Just as the development of the student through school is designed to

be linear and cumulative, appropriate families encourage the linear development of their children toward independent adulthood.

- Fourth, appropriate families coordinate with teachers and other school officials to support children's engagement in school activities. Appropriate families also provide school-like activities outside of school, but never to the distraction or detriment of students' engagement with school activities.
- Fifth, appropriate families have sufficient resources to support students' engagement in school activities. These resources include *money* for school supplies, *space* set aside for students to do homework, *time* for children to engage in school activities and for parents to assist in these activities, and *transportation* to and from school-related events.
- Sixth, appropriate families share the cultural and linguistic traditions that are utilized by the school, and parents possess much of the knowledge that students will learn in school. Appropriate families speak Standard American English (SAE) fluently, understand the particular requirements of school institutions, can provide or obtain homework help, and value the kind of learning that is offered by schools.
- Seventh, appropriate families *believe in* both aspects of the dual mission of schooling: to provide students with knowledge for both individual economic success and democratic participation as a thoughtful and respectful citizen.

I pulled together this configuration of teachers' assumptions about appropriate families through their discussion of its negation. Teachers believed that families were a source of trouble when they: 1) provided insufficient physical and emotional care; 2) allowed students to feel "stress" from supposed adult concerns; 3) expected children to provide care for the family; 4) failed to monitor and supplement children's school work; 5) did not provide children with sufficient school supplies, space and time for homework, or transportation to school; 6) did not speak fluent SAE, did not possess the knowledge taught in schools, or did not understand how school institutions operate; and 7) placed too little emphasis on one aspect of school's dual mission, for example, by sacrificing good citizenship for grades as a path to economic success (in privileged communities) or by denying that schools provide opportunities for upward mobility (in disadvantaged communities).

These common assumptions about the kinds of families appropriate for producing good students make clear that smooth classroom relations and the ability of teachers to influence student performance are predicated upon a wide variety of assumptions. Some of these assumptions have been critiqued in the past. For example, Angela Valenzuela (1999) noted that by validating a limited of linguistic resources and knowledge, schools not only fail to build upon Mexican immigrant families' academic and cultural resources, but also *subtract* these resources from successive generations of Mexican American students. Similarly, a number of authors have used the term "cultural capital" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) to describe the ways in which schools validate and build upon some interactive styles and forms of knowledge but not others. For example: Annette Lareau (2003) argued that schools reward a particular middle-class parenting style that invests considerable resources in teaching children to navigate adult institutions with a sense of entitlement; Prudence Carter (2005) observed that schools value the cultural and linguistic styles of white students while de-valuing the "non-dominant cultural capital"

possessed by African American students; and Lisa Delpit (2006) argued that white teachers often fail to recognize that the school both transmits and validates a “culture of power.” Because of this misrecognition, white teachers working with students of color may utilize instructional or disciplinary styles that are “at odds with community norms” and may “misread students’ aptitudes, intent, or abilities as a result of the difference in styles of language use and interactional patterns” (Delpit 2006:169).

Previous studies that utilize the concepts of “cultural capital” or a “culture of power” capture important ways in which schools are institutionally structured to validate the interactional styles of economically privileged white students. However, using an expansive view of all aspects of *institutionally appropriate families* makes clear that cultural patterns related to racial-ethnicity or class are not the only, or even necessarily the most important, variable influencing students’ opportunities or success in school. Factors such as students’ ability to eat and do homework, to feel safe at home and in their community, and to prioritize personal development over their family’s wellbeing may all be influenced by whether students attend segregated schools that are privileged or disadvantaged by racial-ethnicity and class. A focus on culture may therefore elide some of the most pressing structural inequalities that schooling institutions reproduce. For example, when I asked special education teacher Brian Yates what his biggest concerns were in his first year of teaching, he did not respond by discussing disciplinary styles or motivational techniques. Instead he replied:

My biggest concern was that my students had actually eaten, the second was that they had a roof over their head, the third was that they weren’t being prostituted. A lot of my kids were being exploited by group homes or by pimps. Then after that came education.

Previous studies of the racialized and classed discourses that teachers use as they interact with their students or explain poor student performance highlight one way in which inequality is enacted and reproduced through interpersonal interactions (McLaren 1999; Ferguson 2000). However, a broader view acknowledges that these discourses are often used to express real frustrations that teachers experience when the presumed *institutionally appropriate family* does not match the lived reality of their students outside of school. As described in Chapters 5 and 6, teachers at Unity and Bunker made additional, personal investments to try to ameliorate this institutional gap. This gap, and the additional investments required to fill it, represent a form of inequality between privileged and disadvantaged schools under conditions of quarantined disadvantage. In the following sections, I will describe how teachers critiqued such inequality as resulting from inequitable institutional structures and the work they did to remedy this inequality.

### **Critiquing Institutional Inequality**

When teachers at Unity and Bunker High School complained about parents who failed to provide students with the appropriate “motivation” for school, they often tied these complaints to a description of various structural factors pertaining to racial-ethnicity and class that, in their view, caused families to deviate from their expected behavior or structure. For example, teachers identified obstacles that parents faced due to poverty and immigration status in finding childcare, supporting their family through one steady job, or establishing a stable home with ample space for all family members. Teachers connected family structure to other challenges related to the organization of disadvantaged segregated communities as well. For example, Jason Trice, a 16-year

veteran math teacher at Bunker, specifically referred to the historical introduction of crack cocaine into low-income African American communities in the 1980s to explain the school's decline:

Crack came out in '83, hit the hood hard in '85, so those kids who were born in '83, I was doing the fuzzy math that probably in the mid-2000s there wouldn't be any crack babies left and it would return to normal. No, it only got worse because you have a foundation of children who grew up with loose family structure... When I first started [teaching in Silverwood], there were more stable homes for children, particularly the Black children. But the Latino children are now also starting to fall into that category with students being born whose parents are of the second generation. First generation's pretty much same culture as Mexico. But the second generation starts to acquire the deleterious parts of our culture. Drugs and gang culture and divorce are now in Latino homes, which when I first started, was unheard of.

Though stated in a course manner, Jason's explanation for the decline in students' academic performance at Bunker High School shows an understanding of the detrimental effects of crack cocaine on family structures in low-income, African American and Latino communities (Reinarman and Levine 1997) as well as the potential consequences of what some scholars have called "downward assimilation" within the Latino community (Zhou 1997). The empirical veracity of these explanations is less important than the fact that Jason made sure to connect his understanding of family structure to larger structures of inequality. Teachers also demonstrated an awareness that schools validated cultural habits that were normative in privileged white communities. For example, Bunker science teacher Sarah Hart stated:

It's a cultural difference. A lot of the parents just don't understand – 'why the hell are you going to the aquarium? Why would you waste your time there?' There's also norms. Most white kids – its not even white kids. Let me rephrase this – it's a socioeconomic difference. Higher socioeconomic classes – middle class, upper class, they've been exposed to different things. Whereas the kids in Silverwood, they only know what a tree is because they've seen pictures in books.

Teachers developed these understandings through teaching programs, through personal curiosity about teaching, and in conversation with other teachers. But they also developed sophisticated understandings of school and community dynamics through direct contact with students and their family members. At the integrated elementary school where Ann Ferguson (2000) observed teachers stereotyping the behaviors of Black boys as deviant, she found that teachers had little actual contact with Black parents. Instead, "[Teachers'] knowledge of the family was quite superficial, inflamed by cultural representations and distorted through a rumor mill." However, many Bunker and Unity teachers I interviewed reported having contact with families through living in the neighborhood of the school, participating in family events, providing tutoring that was open to the community, visiting museums or plays with students' families, or through parents' visits to campus.

Despite having contact with some families, teachers also often reported that they saw parents less than they would like. Unity and Bunker teachers critiqued their schools

for presenting barriers to their engagement with low-income and non-white families. According to Bunker science teacher Sarah Hart, parents who visited the school might get “yelled at” by the secretaries in the front office or “ignored” if they didn't speak English. Bunker English teacher Charis Doran said that parents who did not speak English were “swept under the rug” at Bunker. Along these same lines, Bunker English teacher Monica Baker told me:

A lot of times parents, especially immigrant parents, have such negative experiences or just a lack of experience with education at all that they don't know how to teach their children how to negotiate through the academic world. That's an issue... I think its that we don't give our immigrants credit for all that they've done to come here, its always a model of deprivation vs. what the kids are bringing. There's also, I think, some racism in the fact that if the kids speak Spanish and English, oh he's deficient, whereas a kid who speaks Italian and English, oh, he's bilingual! That's a problem. I think its just maybe not valuing the life experience and the skills that kids already bring.

Teachers like Monica extended their understanding of the challenges facing low-income and non-white families in segregated communities to include the challenges presented specifically by the school. That is, they acknowledged that schooling institutions were set up in a manner that would make them easier to negotiate for families that were white and middle class. Like Monica's, some of these critiques also went further, to include the ways in which school organization and curricular requirements discriminated against students and their families. For example, when I asked Bunker science teacher Donna Francis if she believed that schools were a mechanism to lift students out of poverty, she referred frankly to the school's disorganization:

It depends on where you go to school. Either the school's going to help you or the school's going to exacerbate the problem. If you go to school every day and you still cant pass the [exit exam], what's the point of going to school? That's not helping you, not going to make you a better person and give you the skills you need to succeed... So I think it's a combination of things. I don't think its only school. I think school done well – Yes, it could be only school. But we don't do school well here. There's way too many people failing and not succeeding and a large portion of that is because of school.

Even at Unity, however, where teachers worked together to reach out to parents through developing a parents' center and through involvement in school programs, extracurricular groups, and local non-profits, teachers still critiqued mismatches between institutional expectations and family realities. For example, Judy Barlow told me:

The digital divide is so real here. It's huge here. We have a parent portal. Parents have access to not only the attendance of their student but also the gradebook of every teacher for every assignment and every kid. That's huge. But our parents can't access it, 'cause they don't have computers. They don't have Internet - that's expensive. So what are we going to do about that?

Alvin Walton also raised the problem of socioeconomic constraints, and tied these to the reproduction of racial inequality in segregated schools. He stated, “the problem with comparing Blacks and Hispanics to whites and Asians is that you have a socioeconomic gap to begin with which is correlated to almost everything. So you’re going to see that gap played out over and over again.” Taking issue with my question about the test score gap between white students and their Black and Latino counterparts, he posited that racial-ethnicity and class are deeply intertwined in US social structure, continuing:

That gap is something that is characteristic of this society and the way that it was built. It started with a big gap. You talk about slavery for example, segregation – as a race you have started with one having a huge head start and one has started far behind being really handicapped by design... There’s individuals who rise above it – obviously, we have a Black president and Black successful people – but you look at the big picture and you still see a lot of the effects of that system of oppression. I know that still explains a lot. You can stop talking about it, but there are still symptoms of it that are unaddressed, and until you address them, you’re going to have crime, drugs, broken families. That’s what we’re dealing with in our classrooms.

Other teachers echoed Alvin’s contention that teachers in segregated schools had to contend with broader legacies of racial-ethnicity and class inequality as they worked to educate students. For example, Bunker science teacher Hakima Green told me “this is stratified America. There’s always going to be the haves and the have-nots,” and Unity career teacher Oscar Vega lamented an early end to desegregation and affirmative action policies before they could “affect a full generation. To say that we’re all considered equal now doesn’t seem to be right.” Finally, Bunker science teacher Donna Francis stated:

There’s a lot of issues and disparities because of race that are brought into education that if you actually dealt with the issue of race, then we could better deal with education... I do believe in the trickle down effect. If we don’t make things equal and balance it out, it’s not going to be equal and balance out.

Although their immediate frustrations with student behaviors were sometimes vented against parents and families, this understanding of the larger social context of their work provided the true background for teachers’ frustration with media figures and politicians who scapegoated teachers for school failures. Teachers I interviewed at Bunker and Unity High Schools felt that inequality was deeply ingrained in US society, and that despite their efforts to help their students achieve mobility, individual teachers did not have the power to resolve deeply entrenched social problems. Thus, Bunker English teacher Monica Baker said that politicians should:

Quit blaming all the teachers. It really hurts when people like to play the blame game. It’s so simple to say that our schools are failing our children. On some level they’re right, but it’s not just the schools’ fault. It’s a societal problem. It takes a village. We all need to do our part. I would say quit blaming teachers. Most of us are trying to do the best we can with the limited resources that we have.



### Community-Appropriate Schools

Although teachers of low-income students saw the larger social context and the institutional structure of schooling as constraining their ability to help these students achieve upward mobility, they still believed in the potential for education to open up new opportunities for students. Teachers invested in caring for students they perceived as facing societal challenges because they found great personal satisfaction when individual students achieved personal or educational success. Beyond individual successes, however, some of the teachers I interviewed at Unity and Bunker articulated an alternative vision for reducing inequality through education. Educational institutions and standardized test-based systems of school and teacher evaluation were focused on individual-level student successes or failures. As I noted in my discussion of *institutionally appropriate families*, schools presume that adults will invest in children's linear and cumulative growth, and that children will receive care rather than provide it. However, some teachers articulated a vision of education that they believed could pose a true challenge to social inequality: education focused on improving communities by helping students to recognize their place in social structure and to take responsibility for opening up opportunity for others.

When I asked Tara Jensen, a white science teacher at Unity, if she believed that education was a tool to lift young people out of poverty, she responded:

I think education is power. The more you know and the more you know about yourself and your community and the world, the more you can do to make it a better place. So I think it's the key to lifting people out of poverty on an individual level but also as a community because if you have – I mean obviously, on an individual level, if you do well in school, you can go to college, you can get a better job. But you can also come back to your community and teach other people or serve as a doctor or serve as whatever role to make that community a better place. I think that could lift whole communities out of poverty.

Tara's colleague, African American math teacher Alvin Walton, was not as cheerfully optimistic in answering the same question, but proposed a similar vision for community success:

One struggle I've had with this profession is the idea that if we can just get these kids to learn, then the poverty problem will be solved. But the reality, as far as I see it, is that even if all these kids graduate high school and are qualified to go to college, and even if they graduate from college and are qualified to go on to the next level, there are still societal problems with poverty. These communities – there aren't any jobs. You see people with college degrees right now that cannot get work so I don't want to have this pipe dream that education's going to be the end all be all answer. To me, the answer is going to be in looking at how to build the communities that the kids actually live in, how to teach them, equip them to actually build their communities.

Teachers like Tara and Alvin articulated a vision of education that was not focused on providing individual students with the ability to "escape" their social circumstances. Instead, they believed that education was about teaching students to

improve social circumstances at the local level by using their own mobility to give back to their community. This vision of teaching made sense to teachers who had followed it themselves; many teachers I interviewed felt a strong moral imperative to teach because they considered sharing knowledge and expanding opportunities for young people in low-income communities to be a social good.

Unity social science teacher Emilio Landrum told his students that he came from a similar background as theirs, with a single, immigrant mother who did not know how to navigate the US schooling system. However, by working hard in school and connecting with teachers, he was able to go on to UCLA for his undergraduate work and then Harvard for his Master's. It was while he was at UCLA that Emilio decided to become a teacher. From visiting his older sister at the school in childhood, Emilio had envisioned UCLA as a diverse university. Instead, entering the university shortly after the passage of Proposition 209, California's ballot measure that eliminated the consideration of race or ethnicity in college admissions, Emilio saw few Black students like himself on campus:

So that got me thinking – What's so difficult about it being more diverse like, just on its own? Because we're in Los Angeles, it's California, so what's going on here? [...] Then, learning and studying more about the education system, I realized, depending on what neighborhood you're from, you might be a lucky one, you get to go to a quality school.., or you might be stuck at a school where there are not enough AP [advanced college preparatory] classes for you to even compete. That got me thinking about how I could either just go on from UCLA, just like kind of forget it, just move on *or* try to help the situation so that other students down the line wouldn't be like me, feeling like they're just out of place.

Emilio Landrum said that his belief that he should "try to help the situation" motivated him to earn a master's in education and to return to low-income, diverse communities as a teacher. He told me that he regularly talked about how he made the decision to teach with his students as well, explaining, "If I wanted to be some high-powered attorney making big bucks I could, but I'd rather show you the way so that we can get a couple of attorneys out of you guys instead of it just being me." Yvonne Starr shared a similar message with her students. Yvonne worked successfully in business before returning to Unity High School, her alma mater, as a career teacher. She regularly explained to her students that in choosing a career, it was important to look beyond salary:

I came from an almost \$70,000 job that all they required me to do was to be there and plug in a computer. And I hated it. So I say look, do you guys think everything is money? And the reality is, that'll only get you so far because you're not happy. So we have those types of conversations. I'm like look at me, I'm not making \$70,000, promise. But I love what I do. I don't have any issue getting up in the morning, I don't have any issue coming in here summer, I don't have trouble spending my money [on teaching expenses].

Schools as institutions validate and build upon particular interactional styles, cultural and academic knowledge, and family resources in terms of space, time, money, transportation, and emotional care. Schools do so through "meritocratic" systems of

evaluation and promotion that are designed to provide individual students with trajectories toward further academic success and ultimately economic success. However, for some teachers who had intimate contact with students and communities that were not served by this system, an alternative understanding of schooling took shape. These teachers believed that despite working in a system that was institutionally flawed, their structural position in classrooms in segregated communities marked by educational disadvantage allowed them the opportunity to guide students toward an alternative social vision. These teachers emphasized moral development over economic attainment, investing in communities rather than individuals, and they believed in a model of civic engagement predicated upon recognizing and challenging inequality.

If, despite the efforts of the courts to desegregate schools under *Brown*, present-day school systems reflect and exacerbate the educational privileges or disadvantages found in segregated communities, how can policies be designed to support these teachers? Many teachers of low-income students of color whom I interviewed articulated a vision of community support and growth that seemed to be at odds with entrenched institutional structures. Is it possible to alter schooling with this vision in mind, seeking to reduce rather than reproduce inequality? Though most teachers I spoke with struggled with this question of larger scale change and doubted that the political will existed to empower disadvantaged students, Unity English teacher Seth Daley suggested an important first step:

First of all, get rid of property tax-based funding... Nobody asks to be born, and these kids certainly didn't ask to be born to poor parents. It's not their fault, but they're being punished for it, and it's really unfair. And I think that, I mean not to be all conspiracy theory about it, but I think it's designed that way. I think it was set in motion that way for a reason and it's to keep the poor people poor and dumb so they don't take the rich people's stuff. And like that's a very simplistic way of saying it but I think that's the case. And for somebody to argue otherwise – they'd have a very hard time. How come those kids get more money? Because their parents are wealthy. Okay, well, then their parents could send them to a private school. But if it's a public school then we really need to level the playing field. And I don't think funding solves everything – I really don't, but it does show a kid that they are valued equally, and just in terms of self-esteem, that's a big deal.

In addition to providing students with a sense of esteem through equity in school resources, it is important to respect and support teachers who do important work to challenge inequality as well. Instead of “publically reviling”<sup>29</sup> teachers like Rigoberto Ruelas, the Los Angeles elementary school teacher who committed suicide after the *Los Angeles Times*' release of value-added scores, teachers I interviewed suggested that as a society, we should ask how we can better support teachers in their mission to provide students with care that enhances their personal and academic growth. Teachers make immense personal investments in their students, and schools and societies should make similar investments in teachers. Emilio Landrum stated:

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<sup>29</sup> Bunker English teacher Victoria used this term to describe the *Times*' publication of value-added scores.

There's virtually no respect [for teachers]. People say 'Oh, that's great what you're doing,' but especially nowadays, there's all these attacks on teachers for failing schools, low expectations for students, all this stuff... I feel like teachers should [receive similar compensation and respect as police or firefighters] because if nothing's done with these kids going through these schools, if society just forgets about them, it's going to be so hurtful towards the country every year that passes. It's like, 'support the troops.' I do. How about the support the teachers? We're fighting a different war. They're physically fighting for freedom with weapons and what have you, but we're fighting for freedom through these ideas that we're trying to instill in our students so that they grow up to buy into this country and buy into the idea that they are American and what it means and all that.

Many teachers I interviewed echoed this sentiment that teachers were disrespected by the general public, and that this disrespect made it harder to teach. For example, Bunker Spanish teacher Celia Whitten told me:

Right now, morale is down... [Teaching is] an honorable position that has been dishonored. I think you do a service and your only reward is to see those kids be successful. But, yet, you're almost being punished for being a teacher now. Which is crazy. I mean, its like they're discouraging people from taking on the task.

Thus, according to these teachers, in order to have any chance at reforming the school system to create equitable outcomes for young people across barriers of racial-ethnicity, class, and neighborhood, policymakers should begin with providing teachers with respect and support. Celia Whitten put it this way:

I have to be taken care of as a teacher. Because I tell you, when I'm not happy, nobody's learning in my class. When I'm happy, kids learn. And it's not like we're asking much. Really, we're not. It's just an adequate amount of students, an adequate amount of resources, and to make it equal everywhere.

## **Conclusion**

Celia's vision of s schooling system where teachers would feel cared for and supported, where students would have sufficient resources for their education, and where schools would strive for equal outcomes across schools not through test-based mandates but through thoughtful, targeted support may seem idealistic. However, it was an ideal that many teachers at Unity and Bunker shared. Though teachers I studied expressed frustrations with student motivation that were based on implicit understandings of *institutionally appropriate families* structured by their schooling institutions, these teachers also articulated an alternative vision for education. In these teachers' view, rather than presuming a set of family and community characteristics required for school success, schools should adapt to the lived reality of students, so that these students could obtain the knowledge and opportunities necessary to improve their community. That is, teachers articulated a vision in which schools would adapt themselves to be appropriate to fostering the wellbeing of communities, or a future of *community-appropriate schools*.

To close this chapter, I will provide a quote about the need for community-appropriate schools from Unity career teacher Yvonne Starr. Toward the end of our

interview, I asked Yvonne what she thought could be done to make outcomes more equal across schools. She took issue with my framing of the question, and articulated a vision of schooling where students could have their particular needs met in a way that would act as a true challenge to the reproduction of inequality across communities:

Equal? That's kind of a pie in the sky type question. I don't know that we want that. I don't know if equal is the word – I think it's more equitable. To be equal, everybody gets a fair slice. But if you're already full and you've had pie for decades, then you really don't even need a slice of the pie. Or you need a different size, but you don't need the same slice. It is the ability to focus in and hone in on the needs of those kids, that environment, those families. And I think understanding that education goes so far beyond the classroom.

## Conclusion

*I think teachers are disrespected by the general public... I think the general public really don't get it. I say to people, when is the last time you've been in the classroom? When is the last time you attempted to teach a young person? Many politicians and parents use teachers as a whipping boy. I think that's sad.*

- Vernon Griffith, Unity English Teacher

In this dissertation, I have told the story of three unequal schools and the teachers who work there. Who is the villain of this story, and who is the hero? Who is to blame for unequal schooling outcomes? Is it teachers who spend too much time caring for their students' non-academic needs, thereby "lowering standards" for low-income, Black and Latino youth? Is it white parents who fled diverse public schools in the 50s, 60s, and 70s to create havens for privilege in private schools or suburban enclaves? Is it low-income, Black and Latino parents who do not live up to the model of institutionally appropriate families and therefore do not fulfill the requirements for sending well-prepared students to school? Or is it the students themselves, the ones who fail to utilize the school system to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and move up the socioeconomic ladder?

Much has been said about the blaming of public school teachers, and yet, the negative rhetoric surrounding them persists. When politicians wish to reform public schooling to reduce school inequality, they often look to individual-level remedies that focus on the performance of the teacher. Perhaps this is because the true villain of school inequality does not lend itself to easy identification. No single group of school actors – teachers, rich parents, poor parents, school administrators, or students – bears responsibility for dramatic inequalities in conditions and outcomes.

Indeed, school inequalities are not even endemic to schools themselves. Rather, school inequalities are related to an entire "constellation" of needs and resources present within particular communities (Pulido 2000). Rather than operating under a system of absolute segregation based upon race, our current schooling system is better described by the term "quarantined disadvantage," which refers to the ways in which privileged white communities have established schools in such a manner that the students with the greatest needs are isolated from their peers with the greatest resources. Historically, as more formal systems of segregation fell to legal challenges in Southern California, white parents responded reactively, treating low-income students and students of color as a contagion that would erode the quality of public schools (Sides 2003). Rather than share school resources with students who had a wider array of educational needs due to class differences and the detrimental effects of racism, schools and neighborhoods isolate middle-class and wealthy white students from their lower-income, non-white peers. These physical institutions, which control the distribution of young racialized and classed bodies across space, persist today.

Once this system of quarantined disadvantage is acknowledged, it becomes difficult to label any individual or any particular group as responsible for school inequalities. Instead of an individual *lack of care* denying students opportunities for educational success, it becomes clear that this system is sustained on the backs of people who care a great deal for and about young people. Rich parents who care about their

children assert themselves in local schools to maintain the best advantages possible (Lareau 1987). Poor parents who care about their children are often shut out by schools but work to assert their presence and to devise family strategies for survival and mobility in the face of institutions that have failed them time and time again (Stack 1974; Griffith and Smith 2005). Teachers – the focus of this dissertation – invest deeply in their work through generous offerings of time, money, emotions, and self to provide care for their students. However, only when they have the proper institutional supports for this care can teachers in *any* context, rich or poor, truly meet their students’ needs.

Through interviews with teachers at three schools whose conditions of inequality were created and sustained by a system of quarantined disadvantage, I found that inequality is reproduced through the promotion and circumscription of certain types of caring relationships in unequal schools. At Prestige High School, care was provided in a way that rendered invisible the white privilege accruing to families in the city of Juniper, and teachers invested far more in students’ academic development than in other aspects of their personal growth. At Bunker High School, teachers invested heavily in providing their students with individual care and protection in the midst of a chaotic community and a dysfunctional school but were not able to connect these investments to a cohesive community of care. Only at Unity High School were teachers able to make deeply fulfilling investments in the social, emotional, and academic development of their students that were shared by other teachers. In making such investments, teachers were rewarded by deep emotional experiences that ranged from grief to joy but also by the important sense that their work to improve the life chances of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth was not in vain.

Thus, a political rhetoric that counterposes caring and uncaring teachers elides some important truths about the work of public school teaching that I have highlighted in this dissertation. First, caring teachers are not the exception but the rule because caring involves not only attitudes but also actions. The work of teaching is the work of assisting in the academic and personal development of young people through sustained interaction. Though teachers’ styles of caring, their level of investment in their students, and the methods through which they build relationships vary widely across individual teachers and schools, the fact remains: Teaching is care work.

Second, teachers are embedded within institutions. Institutions provide the training, funding, physical resources, and curricula that matter for the kinds of care that teachers can provide. So do larger institutionalized practices and attitudes, such as racism and class chauvinism, that contribute to the persistence of material and social inequalities across segregated schools. Teachers conduct their work in locations where daily interactions with students intersect with these larger social forces. Whatever inequalities exist in the larger educational system and in school contexts necessarily affect the work of individual teachers, in part by shaping how teachers care for their students. Attuned to these connections, I have explored the ways in which unequal contexts resulted in differentiated care.

Opening up the “black box” of schools that has plagued theories of reproduction, I have described how the “faculty culture” of each school was intertwined with that school’s position within a system of inequality (Cherubini 2009). Within the sociology of education, schools are commonly understood as the main site where social inequality is reproduced. Schools affirm and build on the assets of socioeconomically advantaged

students at the expense of their peers while rendering that sorting process acceptable through the appearance of individual meritocracy (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). A number of structural factors facilitate this process, including material inequalities across schools (Kozol 1992) and tracking within schools (Oakes 1985; Lucas 1999). It has also been acknowledged that teachers play an important role in this sorting process through their explicit or implicit bias against working class students and students of color (Alexander, Entwistle et al. 1987; Ferguson 2000) or by favoring the cultural styles of more privileged students (Lareau 2003). However, scholars have rarely connected these two factors – school structure and teacher-student relationships – despite substantial evidence that teachers grow and change throughout the experience of teaching (Bullough and Gitlin 1984; McLaren 1989; Morrow and Torres 1995).

The concept of quarantined disadvantage helped me connect these two levels of inequality – the structural and the personal/relational. It also enabled me to represent school inequalities as extending beyond high, spiked campus fences (at Bunker and Unity) or the bright white concrete walls of school buildings (at Prestige). Under conditions of quarantined disadvantage, students enter their schools with vast inequalities of *need* that present as educational disadvantages – the food needs of hungry students; the shelter needs of homeless students; the medical needs of students without health care; the safety needs of students whose communities are marked by violence; the emotional needs of students who have been abused or neglected; the material needs of poor students; the literacy needs of students lacking books at home and open libraries; the linguistic needs of students who do not speak Standard American English; the need for personal dignity of students targeted by racism and policing; and many others. As individuals, teachers strive through caring practices to meet these needs, but their “attitudes and behaviors [may be] part of larger ideologies and structures with clearly established policies and practices that often shape and hinder both teachers and students” (Ochoa 2007:140). That is to say, the social and material resources available for teachers to provide students with care are also unequal across schools, and they influence the development of a faculty culture that can enhance or dampen teachers’ individual ability to meet student need.

According to Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976:48), who theorized that schooling in the US acts as a “replicator” for the dynamics of capitalism, the purpose of the education system is “to reproduce economic inequality and to distort personal development.” In this dissertation, I argue for a slightly different understanding of this critical insight. Instead of asserting that all schools “reproduce inequality” *and* “distort personal development,” I suggest that when schools reproduce inequality, they do so *by* distorting personal development. That is, if we understand care as work done to foster the personal development of another, then schools that constrain care harm students’ full development in ways that reproduce inequality. However, schools that support teachers to care offer the radical potential to challenge inequality by enabling the personal development of their students. Thus, this dissertation offers the critical insight that care is at the center of schools, and how care is deployed holds the key to whether schools will reproduce existing inequalities or empower teachers and students to overcome them.

To review the analysis of the three schools – Bunker, Unity, and Prestige – as they presented distinct *contexts for care*, I present Table 8.1 below with a summary of the key arguments in each chapter. In Chapter 2, I described the resources and needs at each school as they were produced by histories of white flight resulting in conditions of



quarantined disadvantage. At Bunker High School, complete white flight out of the city combined with labor market inequalities resulted in concentrated disadvantage in the city of Silverwood. At Unity, the flight of middle and upper class (but not working class) whites out of public schools (but not out of the city of Amapola) resulted in concentrated disadvantage in terms of student needs within Unity High School combined with critical local resources to meet some of those needs. At Prestige High School, the city of Juniper's history as a white enclave produced a highly privileged student population within the city and the school.

In Chapter 3, I described the faculty culture of Bunker as marked by organizational discord resulting in teachers' focus on creating a refuge for students within the limited space of their classrooms. At Unity High, teachers developed familial bonds with their coworkers that allowed them to focus on collective mobility for their students, whereas Prestige teachers focused on individual academic achievement within a faculty culture marked by polite collegiality but not close collaboration. These faculty cultures, as well as the particular meanings attaching to racial-ethnicity and class in each school, had implications for teachers' emotional experiences pride and shame in their school (Chapter 4). Bunker teachers' mistrust often took on a racialized component due to the insider/outsider dynamic of the Silverwood community, and teachers felt shame towards their school. In contrast, teachers of various racial backgrounds were able to take collective pride as underdogs at Unity due to the sense that students and teachers living and working in disadvantaged conditions could and should stick together. At Prestige, teachers were able to take pride in their school by legitimating the advantages accruing to high-income families and discursively rendering invisible white privilege.

Chapters 5 and 6 focused on teachers' forms of caring in each school. The teachers I interviewed made investments in their students (and, for Unity teachers, in their school) because they reaped psychic rewards from relationships with their students and from their students' personal development. They also sometimes limited these investments to avoid the emotional toll of caring. Teachers' choices around their investments varied among individuals but also across schools in systematic ways. Teachers at Bunker provided stop-gap supports to meet immediate student needs. They hoped to promote students' individual mobility to a career, college, or a stable home life, but they also felt that students often "slipped through the cracks" in teachers' networks of care. At Unity High, teachers worked to facilitate the individual mobility of their students but also saw this as a strategy toward the collective betterment of the historically low-income, racial-ethnic minority community in Amapola. They were supported in their individual investments by a strong network of carers and by institutional supports within the school. At Prestige, teachers focused their investments on the academic success of individual students who ranged from the "brightest" students to special education students to the "middle student." Efforts at caring for students beyond their academic needs were often stymied by powerful parents and the faculty culture.

**Table 8.1. Contexts for Care**

	<b>Bunker HS</b> (Silverwood)	<b>Unity HS</b> (Amapola)	<b>Prestige HS</b> (Lariat)
Dynamics of Quarantined Disadvantage (Ch. 2)	Complete white flight out of city → neighborhood disadvantage	Incomplete white flight to private schools → school disadvantage	White enclave → neighborhood advantage
Faculty culture (Ch. 3)	Organizational discord  Focus on creating a refuge for students	Familial bonds  Focus on collective mobility	Polite collegiality  Focus on individual achievement
Emotional experience of racialized-class dynamics (Ch. 4)	Personalized racial shame	Collective defensive pride as race/class “underdogs”	Pride in legitimated class advantage
Form of Caring (Ch. 5 & 6)	Embattled individual mobility	Supported collective mobility	Individualized achievement

By shifting our focus from the material conditions of unequal schools and their effects on student outcomes to the social conditions of unequal schools and their effects on teacher subjectivity, I have shown that schools as institutions promote a highly individualized definition of school success. This definition excuses schools from meeting the educational needs and other care needs of students who do not come from “institutionally appropriate families” (Chapter 7). Teachers at Bunker and especially at Unity protested this understanding of success by investing in care that extended beyond the boundaries of school institutions and by redefining success in terms of community progress and wellbeing, rather than individual economic trajectories.

The teachers I interviewed in this dissertation who worked in the low-income, majority Latino and African American “intensely segregated minority schools” (Orfield and Lee 2005) of Unity HS and Bunker HS articulated an alternate vision of what is meant by “neighborhood schools.” While definitions of community have long been used in the law to preserve white privilege over and against the interests of racial integration (Orfield and Eaton 1996), these teachers offered an ideal of community-school partnerships, where teachers, students, and families might work together to provide each other with caring support toward the goal of strong and inclusive neighborhoods. Whereas politicians and scholars have long focused attention on resolving the so-called “achievement gap,” these teachers direct us to reconfigure our understanding of inequality in terms of Gloria Ladson-Billing’s (2006) notion of the “education debt.” In economic terms, the “education debt” refers to the “foregone resources that could have (should have) been invest[ed] in (primarily) low income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g. crime, low productivity, low wages, low labor force participation) that require ongoing public investment,” though Ladson-Billings also highlights historical, sociopolitical, and moral dimensions of the debt (Ladson-Billings 2006:5). In order to relieve this debt, we must invest in more than just schools, but in all of these social problems that are contributed by and contribute to school inequalities.

Looking forward, the “education debt” owed by US society in general and economically privileged whites in particular to low-income, racial-ethnic minority youth must be paid to sustain a healthy, functioning society. Over time, the word “minority” is becoming an increasingly meaningless term; in 2011, more than 50% of babies born in the U.S. were not white. As this population expands, there will be dire economic consequences if the achievement gap persists. According to Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2010:5), “if California does not immediately begin preparing more underrepresented students for higher education, by 2020, the state will experience an 11 percent drop in per capita income, resulting in serious economic hardship for the state’s population.” As historically disadvantaged student populations grow, educational equity is an issue not only of Civil Rights, but also of basic economic policy.

The issue of a shrinking white population – alongside rising inequality – has already hit Prestige High School. At the time of my interviews, teachers expressed great concern with a trend of declining enrollment in the district that they attributed to exorbitant home prices and a poor economy that kept many young families out of Juniper. This created a dilemma for the school, which, despite great financial investments from parents, still required per-pupil funding from the state to maintain its faculty and its programs. In response, the school board voted to open enrollment to the school to any parents who worked in the district. This had the potential to attract the children of scientists at a nearby research center but also to attract the children of racially and socioeconomically diverse workers in Juniper businesses and homes.

In general, the teachers I spoke with at Prestige were wary of the changes in student demographics that might accompany this new enrollment plan. For example, science teacher and Juniper resident Marci Wick told me:

The policy to bring out of district students, I question sometimes. Unless we start coming up with classes and courses to meet their needs, it’s going to end up with more and more of the flight [of Juniper children into private schools]. So it is just a concern long-term what’s going to happen. And I hate that, cause it seems racist and it’s not at all – or elitist is the word. Like, ‘we’re not going to let people that don’t live here come in.’ But we’re just not – the district, I don’t think, is realizing the long-term ramifications of their decisions.

Marci’s concerns here perfectly capture the dilemma of quarantined disadvantage. Diverse student needs were produced, concentrated, and reproduced by unequal and segregated school systems. Undoing these conditions would require more than just integrating small numbers of educationally disadvantaged students into the population of Prestige; schools also needed to come up with ways to meet their needs. Thus, the inclusion of these students was perceived as a threat to the privilege that Juniper families had sustained thus far.

Brent Kepley, Marci’s colleague in the science department, presented a slightly different perspective on the change. Brent worried about students he saw at Prestige who lived in other communities because he saw them mistreated by their students. He also observed these students “lose their identity” and become “fragmented.” Brent’s wife worked at a school that served a large number of low-income students and racial-ethnic minorities, and they raised their son in a racially and socioeconomically diverse school

district. He did not plan to take advantage of the opportunity to enroll his son in Juniper schools; instead, he wanted his son to grow up feeling connected to his local community.

In his discussion of the problem of “fragmentation” and identity, Brent raised a final, fundamental need that must be addressed by schools. Rather than assume that merely sharing in the vast financial resources of Juniper would help his son and other students become educationally successful, Brent saw that young people need to feel respected in and connected to their schools and their communities. So too do teachers. Though Bunker presented an extreme example of the burnout that can result when teachers feel unsupported and disconnected, Unity teachers also frequently voiced the wish that local outsiders would acknowledge their hard work and their students’ achievements.

How do we begin to meet students’ needs within schools? And how do we more equitably distribute resources across populations to reduce white privilege and enhance opportunity? These are difficult questions that don’t have easy answers. Clearly, however, reducing inequality must involve the participation of teachers who daily provide care for their students without further exploiting or derogating committed professionals who place a moral value on supporting young people’s development. As Judy Barlow, the art teacher at Unity High, put it, “you have to have all stakeholders at the table. And there has to be an amount of compromise. [*pause*] What else am I willing to give up? I don’t know. What else do I have to give up? I have no life. My time is yours.”

One model that is quietly gaining traction in some neighborhoods is the Community Schools model. According to the Coalition for Community Schools:

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, services, supports and opportunities leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends. Using public schools as hubs, community schools knit together inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, volunteers and community partners. Health and social service agencies, family support groups, youth development organizations, institutions of higher education, community organizations, businesses, and civic and faith-based groups all play a part. (Blank, Melavukke et al. 2003:2)

This model is designed to address the needs particular to a given community, and to provide additional resources so that teachers do not feel overwhelmed when addressing the “whole child” as a part of their work. This model therefore provides the potential to support teachers’ *care* by building critical coalitions of teachers, parents, administrators and community organizations, and to support the dignity of both teachers and their students. However, if this model is to genuinely address conditions of quarantined disadvantage, states must take seriously the equitable distribution of resources across student populations.

I will close with a second quote from Unity English teacher Vernon Griffith, who, like his colleague Yvonne Starr in Chapter 7, took issue with my framing of a question about how to make schools more equal. Like many of the teachers I interviewed, Vernon had already rolled up his sleeves and begun the

work of connecting student needs to resources in the Amapola community where he both lived and worked. He told me:

That word equal is a tricky word. Equity is a better word. Equal will never happen. I just don't think in this society we're going to have equal schools... Only because as an African American, when they desegregated the schools in 1954, what had happened is that the same dynamics that existed prior to 1954 still exist today. So forget the equal thing. I just think that's a political statement. But when you get right down to the meat of it, to what it is that we need, I just think that we need to look at every school differently, every child differently and the needs of these schools and go there.

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## **Appendix A: Research Methods**

My research with teachers began in late spring of 2010 when, after crafting a research proposal, I set out to recruit and interview teachers from districts with diverse racial-ethnic demographics in terms of both students and teachers. At that time, I printed out thousands of recruitment letters, and with the permission of school staff (usually an Assistant Principal), I placed letters in the boxes of teachers in all of the middle schools and high schools in four school districts: Amapola Unified School District, Silverwood Unified School District, and two other school districts – one serving working and middle-class Latino and Middle Eastern immigrant students and one serving middle to upper class white and Asian American students. I was interested in learning how mismatches between teacher racial-ethnicity or class and student racial-ethnicity or class affected teachers' feelings about their work and relationships with their students.

This method of recruitment had a low response rate – I only spoke to 22 teachers that summer. However, this method also provided me with important information that led me to hone my research project to focus in on three schools that epitomized different manifestations of what I later came to term “quarantined disadvantage.” The teachers I interviewed were all well aware of racial and class inequality; in fact, it was a topic they were excited to talk about. In our interviews, they also often connected the current dynamics of their schools to histories of white flight and to conflicts with school boards and community members. I quickly realized that teachers were adept at making connections between micro-level interactions in the classroom and meso- and macro-level factors that shaped school institutions, and I decided that this should be the central focus of my dissertation.

Using theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I selected Unity High School and Bunker High School as two cases of historically segregated schools serving low-income racial ethnic minority students. From my interviews and the reading of history that soon followed, I learned that these schools were both shaped by white flight, but that their histories represented different types of white flight in slightly different eras. Bunker underwent complete inter-city white flight in the 1950s and early 60s, and the vast majority of remaining city residents were low-income; Unity, located in a socioeconomically diverse city, underwent 2 rounds of white flight – once when the nearby wealthy city of Juniper split from Unity to form Prestige High School, and later, in the early 1970s when in response to a desegregation order, middle class white students fled to private schools. Though I had interviewed only a handful of teachers from these schools in my first round of interviews, it already appeared that these differences might be significant for teachers' experiences of their work. The third school I decided to focus on was Prestige High School. I had not originally included Prestige in my first round of recruitment, but Juniper's status as a white enclave community and the school's direct historic relationship to Unity High made it an ideal comparison case to conceptualize segregation in terms of advantage as well as disadvantage.

The second round of recruitment began in April of 2012. From my friendships and my previous round of interviews, I knew that teachers would not want to meet until the summer, but I also wanted to start early because I was determined to reach my goal of recruiting 20 teachers from each school before September. I stepped up recruitment through both direct requests and snowballing. At Unity and Bunker High, over the course of five weeks, I placed two rounds of recruitment letters in teachers' boxes and

one brightly colored half-sheet reminder. I also contacted all Unity teachers whose emails were available on the school website (listing an email address was voluntary) and asked a Bunker teacher I had interviewed to forward my request to the faculty listserv. At Prestige, I only used one round of paper letters because all teacher emails were online. I followed up with three emails to the entire teaching list.

By the end of the summer, I had completed 64 interviews in the new school contexts I chose to study; I used 59 of these as the primary source of data for this dissertation. At Bunker, I interviewed 20 teachers, 2 counselors and 2 former students who were interns at the school; at Unity High I interviewed 21 teachers and 1 student; at Prestige, I interviewed 18 teachers. I conducted the three (current and former) student interviews because teachers offered to set them up; however, they did not add critical insights I needed to the developing theme of teachers investments in care; I did not interview counselors at Prestige or Unity because they did not respond to my requests.

The racial-ethnic and gender makeup of my interviewees is listed in Table A below. African American teachers are underrepresented in my sample from Bunker and overrepresented in my sample from Unity. This is not surprising, given the small N of my study and the challenges involved in a project dependent on voluntary recruitment. I chose intentionally not to recruit using principal introductions because this would likely have prevented me from conducting research at either Prestige or Bunker and because it would have made it difficult to get honest answers from teachers about school administration. Because I used voluntary recruitment techniques, I may also have under-sampled teachers who felt burnt out in their careers. However, this was not a major problem for my research because I was comparing across schools.

**Table A: Teacher Data**

	Bunker HS		Unity HS		Prestige HS	
	School	Sample	School	Sample	School	Sample
N	102	20	60	21	90	18
African American	60.8%	40% (8)	23.3%	47.6% (10)	1.1%	0
White	19.6%	45% (9)	50%	47.6% (10)	77.8%	83% (15)
Hispanic/Latino	14.7%	15% (3)	20%	4.8% (1)	8.9%	11% (2)
Asian Pacific American	4.9%	0	5%	0	7.8%	5.5% (1)
Female		30% (6)		48% (10)		50% (9)

The average age and experience of my respondents was quite similar in Unity and Bunker High Schools. Bunker teachers had an average age of 42 with a range from 29 to 57, and Unity teachers had an average age of 41 with a range from 26 to 70. Bunker teachers I interviewed had an average of 8.9 years of teaching experience [1-30] and Unity teachers had an average of 8.2 years [1-25]. A small majority of teachers in both samples came from families where one parent held at least a bachelor's degree (55% at Bunker and 60% at Unity). The Prestige teachers I interviewed on average were older, had more experience, and came from more educationally privileged families. Two-thirds of Prestige teachers came from households where one parent held at least a bachelors

degree; the average age of these respondents was 47 [26-60] with 15.8 years of experience [4-38].

Once I began interviewing, I asked those informants to remind other teachers of my requests to meet. Some teachers also gave me phone numbers or personal email addresses of other teachers, which I used to make personal requests. Recruitment and interviewing required persistence. Before each scheduled interview, I would send a confirmation email to the participant four days before and then the night before. Even then, I was stood up on multiple occasions and had to reschedule the interview. This was understandable – most teachers I interviewed were less busy in the summer than during the school year, but were still busy with coursework, professional developments, summer school teaching, or child rearing. A few teachers told me that the interview length I advertised in the recruitment letter – approximately 2 hours – presented an obstacle to participation. However, the interviews indeed lasted about this long, and I felt that this length was important to gather the in-depth qualitative data I needed.

I most often interviewed teachers in coffee shops, though on some occasions, we met in their classroom or home. I emailed respondents my photograph before we met so they could find me, and I also wore a Berkeley t-shirt or sweatshirt and carried a Berkeley folder to all interviews to make myself easily identifiable. After meeting, I introduced myself and the project and gave the respondent an opportunity to ask me questions before beginning the interviews. Introducing myself allowed me to mitigate some of the effect of my appearance as a young, blonde, female student who might be ignorant about school inequality. Each time, I explained that my motivation for studying the sociology of education came from my experience attending a large, primarily low-income, racial-ethnically diverse public high school that was known to most participants. I also explained that though I had not been a teacher (a sore point for many interviewees was that scholars make recommendations to teachers “without having ever stepped foot in a classroom”) I had worked for a group home for emotionally disturbed adolescents before attending graduate school. This gave me an opportunity to assert my age and to show empathy to the job of caring for youth.

Despite this prepping, some teachers reacted to my appearance. Jason Trice at Bunker High School brought me a DVD about African American history to watch (as well as a recording of a sermon on the sanctity of marriage). A number of Bunker teachers of various racial-ethnic backgrounds were careful to add caveats to complaints about the school to let me know that they loved their students and that Silverwood was not like its stereotypes. It is possible that these were a natural reaction to having to frequently defend their schools; it is also possible that they were a response to me as a white person and therefore a potentially hostile outsider. My position as a researcher alone also seemed salient – Donna Francis did not speak openly with me about instances of racism at her school until I turned off the tape recorder. Other respondents also reacted to the recorder, apologizing to it for swearing or looking at it uncomfortably when talking about the school board or the principal. I was careful to make clear that teachers could skip any question that they did not wish to answer.

During the interviews, I used open-ended questions that covered a broad range of topics, including teachers’ personal background, educational and work history, perceptions of the school as a workplace, teaching philosophy, relationships with students and other teachers, and thoughts about school inequality and educational policy. The

interview guide is included at the end of the appendix. Typically, I did not ask every question in the guide, but crossed off questions as teachers answered them as part of another answer or skipped around as natural segues appeared. As an interviewer, my goal was to create the feeling of a conversation and to allow natural ideas to flow from my respondents while making sure to cover the same points with nearly all of my respondents. The interview guide changed somewhat over time – for the first 15 interviews, it remained on my desktop as an “evolving interview guide” to be modified after each interview as I saw which questions worked, which failed, and what new topics teachers raised. After this time, I used the same interview guide for all participants. With my interviewees’ permission, I recorded the interviews with a digital recorder and later transcribed them for analysis.

Data analysis followed a modified version of the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) described by Emerson et al. (Emerson, Fretz et al. 1995) and applied in earlier ethnographic studies (Morris 2005; McDermott 2006). Though grounded theory was designed to generate theoretical interventions through participant observation, a modified approach is appropriate for the rich, qualitative data generated by long, loosely structured interviews. I approached the interviews with a broad interest in exploring teachers’ subjective experiences of inequality in schools with histories related to white flight. As the interviews progressed, themes emerged from teachers’ descriptions of their work. I incorporated these themes into the interview guide and also used them as an informal source of probes during our conversations. Further coding of the data for a deep reading of emerging themes took place after all interviews were complete. I then researched secondary sources on local history and school data found in Student Accountability Report Cards and reports to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges to connect these themes to larger scale institutional factors. Alison Griffith and Dorothy Smith (2005) use the term “institutional ethnography” to describe this form of research, which situates in-depth interview data within larger institutional structures. They describe it as “a method of exploring outward from the experiential world into those social relations that constitute our experience – social relations in which people actively participate, and yet are larger than the experiential scope of any individual” (Griffith and Smith 2005:3). It was this method that enabled me to find the themes of care, needs, and resources that were so prevalent across my interviews and to connect these themes to conditions of quarantined disadvantage.



## Teacher Interview Guide

### **Closed Questions**

Age:

Race:

Parents job/education levels.

Current living situation (married, kids etc)

- Partner's job/education level/racial background
- Where live
- Kids schools

How long have you been a teacher?

Subject/Grades:

### **BEFORE TEACHING**

- Can you tell me about your educational background, starting with high school and then through college or grad school? (Prompts: types of schools, experiences there)
- Tell me about how you made the decision to become a teacher.
- Did you have any experiences with teachers growing up that stand out to you (they could be positive or negative)?
- Can you tell me the history of your teaching career?
- What work experience did you have before entering teaching?
- Tell me about the training you got to become a teacher.

### **TEACHING CONTEXT:**

- Tell me about how you made the decision to work at \_\_\_\_HS.
- Are you involved in any organizations on campus?
- Tell me about the history of \_\_\_\_ HS.
  - changes you've seen in your time there
- Has there ever been a time at \_\_\_\_HS when you felt that you did not have access to the resources you needed?
- What kinds of technology do you use in the classroom?
- Tell me about your relationship to your principal.
- What are your relationships like with other teachers?
- What is your impression of the school board?
- Have you ever witnessed tension over issues like race or class among students at \_\_\_\_HS
  - gender/sexual orientation
- What are the greatest challenges facing your students?
- What are the greatest challenges you face as a teacher?
- What are the greatest challenges \_\_\_\_HS faces?
- What are the greatest strengths of \_\_\_\_HS?
- What is the community's perception of \_\_\_\_HS?
- How do people react when you say your work at \_\_\_\_ HS?
- If you could name one or two things \_\_\_\_HS could do to better support you as a teacher, what would they be?

- How do you imagine being a teacher at X high school would be different from being a teacher at Y high school?

### **Experience of Teaching:**

- What do you like most about teaching?
- What do you dislike about teaching?
- Tell me about some of the more emotionally draining aspects of teaching
- Do you have a favorite story to tell about work to friends or family?
- How do you know if you are doing a good job as a teacher?
- What kinds of values would you like to impart to your students?
- Can you tell me about someone you work with you consider to be a good teacher?
- Tell me about someone who you don't consider to be a very good teacher
- Arne Duncan recently stated that schools are society's most important tool to lift young people out of poverty. What are your thoughts on this statement?

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

- Tell me about your demeanor when you interact with students. What is your teacher personality?
- How does it compare to your personality outside of school?
- How do you maintain discipline in your classroom?
  - What are the most common disciplinary problems you have to deal with?
- When do you see your students outside of class time?
  - door open before/after school, lunch/nutrition
  - spend time at parties/quinceaneras/baby showers
  - how can students contact you outside of school?
- Do you ever talk about your life with students?
- Do students ever talk to you about their personal lives?
- Have you ever had to intervene in a student's personal situation, for example, by contacting CPS or a school psychologist?
- Can you tell me about a student with whom you have a good relationship?
- Can you tell me about a relationship that is more difficult?
- Can you tell me about a time when you felt you had an impact on a student's life?
- Do you ever have contact with students who have graduated?
- What kind of interactions do you have with your students' parents?
- Is there anything about your personal background that you feel helps you relate to your students?
  - Hinders you?
- Do you think there are any issues particular to being an X RACE teacher at \_\_\_\_HS?

### **POLITICS**

- What contribution do you feel you make to society as a teacher?
- If you were invited to speak to President Obama about educational policy, what changes to the school system would you advise him to make?
- What do you think can or should be done to make schools more equal?

- One topic of major concern to sociologists of education is the test score gap between white students and black and latino students. From your experience as a teacher, what factors would you say might contribute to this gap?

### **WRAP UP**

- Do you feel happy with your choice to become a teacher?
- Plans for the future
- What organizations are you involved in outside of school?
  - church
  - political
  - union involvement
- How has being a teacher affected who you are as a person?