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To Be Young, Gifted, Black, and Somewhat Foreign: The Role of Ethnicity in Black Student Achievement

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Educational achievement, and thus social mobility, is critically important to West Indian immigrants and their children. Much of the literature on West Indians' social attainment focuses on their success relative to that of African Americans (see Bryce-Laporte 1972, 1993; Butcher 1994; Foner 1985, 1987; Kasinitz 1987, 1992; Model 1991, 1995; S. Stafford 1987; Vickerman 1999, 2001; Waters 1999, 2001).[1] In fact, qualitative, quantitative, and theoretical scholarship on contemporary black immigrants frequently argues that success among West Indians involves maintaining West Indian culture (Kalmijn 1996; Ogbu 1991a, 1992; Sowell 1978),[2] while downward mobility is a function of assimilation into the "underclass" culture of African Americans (see Gans 1992; Ogbu 1991a; Portes & Zhou 1993). Many scholars believe that for West Indians, acculturation and economic mobility are not necessarily linked in the ways they were for European immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century (Gans 1992; Portes & Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1994).

The idea that resisting assimilation to African American culture boosts West Indians' socioeconomic status is grounded in scholarship on educational aspirations and achievement among African American students, work that deems them as educationally lacking compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes and Zhou 1993). Even when accounting for the diversity within the black population, both African and Caribbean immigrants achieve a higher level of education than African Americans (Logan & Deane 2003). To explain this disparity between African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups, researchers often turn to John Ogbu's (1974, 1978) cultural ecological theory (CET). CET draws important distinctions between two

minority groups: those Ogbu termed "immigrant" or "voluntary" minorities, and those he labeled "castelike" or "involuntary" minorities. Immigrant minorities are those who have moved to the United States "in the belief that this change will lead to an improvement in their economic well-being or to greater political freedom" (Ogbu 1990b, p. 145). Involuntary minorities are people "initially brought into the United States through slavery, conquest, or colonization" (Ogbu 1990b, p. 145).

The theory posits that as a result of racial discrimination and limited socioeconomic prospects, some minority groups maintain culturally distinct approaches to opportunity structures. By comparing the historical, structural, and psychological factors influencing the educational adjustment problems of voluntary minorities with those of involuntary minorities, Ogbu contended, one could demonstrate why the latter "are plagued by persistent poor academic performance while the former are not" (Ogbu 1990, p. 146).[3] The legacy of slavery and racism leads many African American students to believe that high academic achievement only benefits white students. This belief prompts them to lower their own aspirations for schooling. Over time, academic achievement comes to be associated with the dominant culture, and is perceived as "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu 1986).

There has been, and continues to be, considerable debate about the applicability of the CET framework. Some researchers argue that the Fordham-Ogbu thesis needs to more carefully consider the following issues: within-group variation (Carter 1999; Kao & Tienda 1998); class and gender (Carter 1999; Kao & Tienda 1998); specific schooling context (Hemmings 1996); and family histories, resources, and interactions (Mickelson 1990; O'Connor 1997). Other scholars posit that African American students at all socioeconomic levels adhere to the dominant achievement ideology (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey 1998; Cook & Ludwig 1998; O'Connor 1997; Tyson 1998, 2002). As a group, these studies reveal the need for more nuanced understandings of the effects of social location on social mobility. Given the unprecedented number of immigrants of color currently in the United States, there is an additional and equally important factor not covered by these critiques, however. What is missing is an analysis of the ways in which children of immigrants, particularly children of black immigrants, complicate some of the fundamental premises of the CET model regarding achievement and perceptions of opportunity.[4]

It is important to note that Ogbu did address the unique circumstances of children of immigrants in the CET model. He asserted that voluntary minorities do not perceive or interpret learning the norms of schools "as threatening to their own language and identity (Ogbu 1987, p. 328); as a result, second-generation immigrants will follow the educational trajectory of their parents (Ogbu 1990b). According to the CET model, immigrants recognize but acquiesce to discrimination because they not only imagine themselves as

"guests in a foreign land," but also imagine social obstacles (particularly those encountered in school and other social institutions) as merely temporary barriers to overcome in the pursuit of upward mobility. However, the model does not account for two important factors relevant to the children of immigrants: (1) second-generation West Indians, having been raised primarily in the United States, do not necessarily consider themselves as "guests in a foreign land"; and (2) second-generation West Indians have encountered the same obstacles confronted by involuntary minorities and do not consider social barriers, particularly those related to race, as "temporary."[5] Given that second-generation West Indian immigrants are both exposed to their parents' conception of the American opportunity structure and confronted with the challenges common to involuntary minorities, how are we to best understand their perceptions of opportunity and strategies for social mobility?

Immigration studies often present an uncomplicated picture of how individuals perceive opportunities and social mobility. For example, Portes and Zhou (1993) describe the process of "segmented assimilation," whereby acculturation may result from one of several paths: incorporation into (middle-class) mainstream culture; incorporation into the underclass; or assimilation in which individuals draw on the cultural capital of their own immigrant community. Portes and Zhou argue that immersion in the immigrant community buffers immigrant children, protecting them from prejudice and racism, in addition to allowing parents access to material resources that may facilitate upward mobility. For second-generation West Indians, this proves to be somewhat of a dilemma; as a function of race, the West Indian community is often subject to prejudice and discrimination. Conversely, assimilating to African American culture is regarded as a path leading to downward mobility (Portes and Zhou 1993). Curiously, in identifying adaptation options, the authors overlook the existence of the African American middle class and their mobility strategies. They do not consider that African Americans "might provide immigrants with a cultural framework or even a destination for assimilation" (Neckerman, Carter, & Lee 1999, p. 960).

I argue that second-generation West Indians do face racial barriers, and that they respond by employing strategies usually attributed to the African American middle class. These include family involvement, high standards for achievement set by peer groups, and the use of ethnic social networks. However, I also contend that these perceptions of opportunity and modes of mobility are not limited to the middle classes. The experiences of the second-generation West Indians in my study indicate that both low-income and middle-class youth engage in behaviors that encourage mobility for West Indians.

This chapter draws on findings from a larger study that examined the ways in which second-generation West Indians assess the process of upward mobility in relation to their social identities. The discussion presented here

focuses on how the second generation navigated the educational system and what resources they mobilized to achieve school success. The analysis is grounded in data from interviews with eighty-five second-generation West Indian immigrants raised primarily in the greater New York metropolitan area. The sample includes low-income, working- and middle-class respondents, in an effort to capture possible variation in these groups' conceptions of perceived opportunities and mechanisms for achievement. Contrary to the CET model (Ogbu 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1999), my findings suggest that perceptions of mobility (and thus educational aspirations and achievements), emerge as the second generation attempts to reconcile their racial and ethnic identities within an American classification system that is primarily based on race. The type of educational socialization they received in the home, the understandings of race and achievement they developed in their peer groups, their experiences (or lack of experiences) with discrimination in educational institutions, and their use of ethnic social networks are the factors that most significantly influence the second generation's perceptions of opportunity, and thus their pursuit of upward mobility.

Similarly to the work of Annette Hemmings (1996, 1998), I also posit that school context dramatically impacts perceptions of opportunity and strategies of mobility for the West Indian second generation. In this study, "school context" refers to the racial and ethnic makeup of the student body, the institutional racialized (and nonracialized) practices employed by agents of the school (i.e., teachers, guidance counsellors, other administrative staff), as well as the level of student interaction. My research demonstrates the multiple ways in which second-generation West Indians respond to various school contexts in order to bring about the desired result of academic achievement. Understanding that their racial barriers, in and out of school, are by no means "temporary," the respondents in this research actively worked against their negative social positioning and developed strategies that fostered high aspirations and achievement.

Employing Portes and Zhou's (1993) ideology of the utility of the immigrant community in achieving social mobility, I also investigate the function of West Indian social networks in shaping perceptions of opportunity for the second generation. Data indicate that social networks play a greater role in academic aspirations and the educational trajectory of second-generation West Indians than would ordinarily be attributed. Despite racial obstacles, the second generation has been able to gain admittance to several advanced educational programs and/or academic institutions as a result of co-ethnics positioning within the New York employment structure.

In demonstrating the ways that second-generation West Indian immigrants depart from Ogbu's CET model, the specific aims of the chapter are to (1) illustrate context-specific conceptions of achievement, focusing on peer groups in predominantly black and predominantly white institutions; (2) demonstrate the critical role of ethnic social networks; and (3) encourage those who study the impact of social identity on achievement to conduct further work on the educational experiences of second-generation immigrants so that we may gain a greater understanding of this complex population.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The assertion that second-generation West Indians exceed the socioeconomic status of their parents, and thereby surpass that of African Americans, was made initially by Thomas Sowell (1978). He argued that the socioeconomic success of West Indian immigrants relative to that of African Americans "undermines the explanatory power of current white discrimination as a cause of current black poverty" (Sowell 1978, p. 49). Sowell's work aroused heated debate that focused on verifying or disproving his initial theory, while at the same time scholars sought to explain the differential success patterns between West Indians and African Americans.

Sowell's assertion stimulated several investigations of West Indian immigrants and assessments of their success relative to African Americans, who are seen as a "natural" comparison group due to their shared racial ascription.[6] Scholarship on West Indian immigrants has documented their position in employment and housing markets (Butcher 1994; Crowder 1999; Farley & Allen 1987; Model 1991, 1995; Sowell 1978); their economic success (or lack thereof) relative to African Americans (Butcher 1994; Farley & Allen 1987; Kalmijn 1996; Model 1991, 1995; Sowell 1978; Waldinger 1996); and their reception and subsequent treatment in the United States, along with their adaptive responses to this treatment (Bryce-Laporte 1972, 1987, 1993; Foner 1979, 1985, 1987, 2001; Kasinitz 1992; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999).

The limited but growing body of research on second-generation West Indians has investigated constructions of racial and ethnic identity in relation to racism and discrimination (Butterfield 2001, 2003, 2004a; Kasinitz, Battle, & Ines 2001; Mollenkopf, Kasinitz, & Waters 1995; S. Stafford 1987; Stepick, Stepick, & Eugene 2001; Waters 1996, 1999, 2001; Woldemikael 1985, 1989); studies also have examined whether the second generation represents continued success from the previous generation or whether members of this group undergo an alternative assimilation process leading to differential mobility outcomes (Butterfield 2001, 2003, 2004b; Kalmijn 1996; Kao & Tienda 1995; Waters 1996, 1999).[7]

Research to date has focused on "objective" indicators of educational and socioeconomic status attainment (e.g., grade-point average, income) among second-generation West Indians (Kasinitz, Battle, & Ines 2001; Stepick, Stepick, & Eugene 2001; see also Dodoo 1991). With the exception of Nancy Lopez (2003), there have been no assessments of the attitudes and belief

systems of the members of this population, nor have there been examinations of how these attitudes and beliefs relate to perceived opportunities and achievement.[8] This research addresses these gaps.

Second-generation West Indians—be they high achieving or not—assimilate into a social system with a structured racial hierarchy that automatically relegates black people of all classes and ethnicities to the bottom of the racial ladder (Bashi 1998a; Omi & Winant 1994). However, for many second-generation West Indians, this positioning implies a future that is antithetical to the one they and their parents have envisioned. Contrary to the CET model, this negative social positioning compels second-generation West Indians to establish alternative strategies for achievement. The intent of this chapter is to examine the ways in which the members of the second generation defined achievement for themselves and to analyze the mechanisms they employed to reach their goals.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND METHODS

The findings reported here are drawn from research guided by grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967), which allows respondents to present their personal experiences in a way that reveals how they "make sense" of their social world (Patton 1990). Data were collected via semi-structured, open-ended interviews with a sample of eighty-five second-generation West Indians, aged twenty to thirty-two.[9] The respondents were part of a larger research project (see Butterfield 2001) that examined constructions of identity among second-generation West Indian immigrants living in metropolitan New York.[10] That study specifically focused on identity in relation to race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. The interviews I report on in this chapter took place over two separate periods: I interviewed sixty-five respondents from October 1998 to August 1999, and another twenty respondents from October 2001 to February 2002. The sample was recruited using a modified snowball sampling approach. I tapped my personal network through word of mouth and also spoke with individuals I met through my ties with two West Indian community organizers. I soon had introductions to several individuals who fit the project's age and ethnic criteria. At the conclusion of the initial interview with these first respondents, I solicited each for referrals. Other respondents were recruited when they approached me after learning about the study from peers who had already been interviewed; from neighborhood associates who informed them of my work; or after they had briefly observed my research-related activities in any one of several New York and New Jersey communities.[11]

I selected respondents based on their age, gender, country of origin, and, later, their residential neighborhood. Sampling on place of residence was of

particular importance to me, as different metropolitan New York neighborhoods often delineated differences in class status, level of contact with other native-born and immigrant groups, and, in a few cases, length of stay in the United States.[12] I shifted my sampling strategy over time to try to ensure that no relevant categories were missed. For example, I began specifically targeting West Indian male respondents when I realized my sample was becoming female skewed (the final sample is almost evenly split, with forty-four female respondents and forty-one male respondents).

For analytical purposes, I treat "race" and "ethnicity" as distinct concepts. Race is defined as socially constructed distinctions drawn on the basis of physical appearance, while ethnicity is operationalized in terms of distinctions based on national origin, language, religion, food, and other cultural markers.[13] I define "West Indian" to include all peoples not of Asian ancestry who are descended from those born in the Anglophone Caribbean. The thirteen Caricom member nations, the mainland countries of Guyana and Belize, the Caribbean British colonies, and English-speaking Panamanians are covered by that definition.[14] "Second-generation West Indians" are identified as those who have at least one parent who was born in the West Indies.[15]

The respondents' residences covered four of New York City's five boroughs (Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens), Nassau-Suffolk County, and Newark and Irvington in New Jersey. Over the last few decades, metropolitan New York has absorbed a disproportionately large share of the nation's total West Indian population. Recent estimates put the number of West Indians at approximately 600,000, somewhat more than one-quarter of New York City's total black population (Logan & Deane 2003). Researcher Reuel Rogers asserts that "if the current immigration and demographic trends persist, first- and second-generation West Indians will soon outnumber African Americans in New York City" (2001, p. 164). Consistent with the literature on the residential patterns of West Indians in New York, the majority of respondents resided in Brooklyn and Queens (see Crowder & Tedrow 2001; Foner 1985; Kasinitz 1992; Logan & Deane 2003; Waters 1999).[16]

In addition to probing perceptions of opportunity, the interview schedule included questions about racial and ethnic self-identification; the composition and structure of social networks; the incorporation of ethnicity into household life; the negotiation of ethnic boundaries; and experiences in both school and workplace environments. Interviews averaged two hours and fifteen minutes, with the longest lasting five hours (completed in two meetings) and the shortest, one hour. The locations of the interviews varied. Some took place in the respondent's home or place of employment; others occurred in coffee shops/diners, parks, or fast-food restaurants—wherever was most convenient for the respondent.[17] Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed, then coded and analyzed using a qualitative data computer program.

It is important to note that while this chapter addresses the issue of academic achievement among West Indian adolescents, the data presented here were gathered from young adult West Indians. Researchers Robyn Fivush (1991, 2001) and Katherine Nelson (2003) have argued that memory recovery presents challenges for researchers, including subjects' intentional and unintentional lack of accuracy in recounting past events (see also Freeman 1998). It is normal for individuals to idealize the past, to reconstruct history, and to view the past through the lens of the present. "In addition, research has shown that young adults are simply in a different 'developmental place' than adolescents. This 'different place' includes their perceived 'developmental tasks,' current independence, etc., which includes 'lessons learned' upon looking back and cognitive/intellectual processing capacity" (Spencer 2004). These are important considerations. However, I argue that because the respondents are at a different developmental stage, they can be more objective about their adolescent experiences than was possible when they actually were adolescents. In addition, as young adults, the respondents are more likely to be honest about their past behaviors/histories, as they have no fear of possibly having to suffer consequences for their actions.

RESULTS

Not surprisingly, all of the respondents articulated the dominant narrative of how success is achieved in the United States—through hard work, individual effort, and education. Despite the varying levels of education represented in the sample,[18] all respondents emphasized the importance of educational achievement, coupled with a willingness to "work as hard as you have to" to succeed. The interview data, however, also suggest that the meanings respondents attribute to education and success are complicated by issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Indeed, the respondents created what O'Connor (1999) refers to as "co-narratives." That is, many of them "maintained an ideological commitment to many of the fundamental elements of the dominant theory of making it, but most of them modified the character and structure of the story by incorporating mitigating factors and circumstances that mediate the efficacy of the individual and affect his or her probability of realizing particular social and educational outcomes" (1999, p. 142). In addition to constructing/negotiating their co-narratives through the lens of their social identities, second-generation West Indians shaped their attitudes and ideas in response to the impact of key social institutional milieus. Understandings of race and ethnicity in the larger social environment, peer groups, student-teacher interactions, and social networks had a significant impact on respondents' perceptions of opportunity and achievement.

The Black Divide: Tensions between First-generation West Indian Immigrants and African Americans

To understand the ways in which second-generation West Indians maneuver through educational institutions and how they interact with their African American counterparts requires first addressing the racial and ethnic attitudes they inherited from their parents. Many first-generation West Indian immigrants actively disassociate themselves from African Americans and are quick to point out what they deem as significant differences between the two groups (Butterfield 2001; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999).[19] First-generation West Indians believe they were/are much harder working and place a higher value on education than do African Americans. These beliefs generally reflect an uncritical acceptance of images of African Americans as "preferring welfare" and being "prone to criminality," stereotypes that are widespread in the United States.[20] The first generation's apparent ease in finding employment in the United States also contributed to their belief that African Americans were "lazy." Members of the first generation were conscious that white employers preferred to hire them over African Americans, and used that knowledge to their own advantage (Waters 1999).

The responses of second-generation West Indians make clear that in communicating the importance of success to their children, members of the first generation often referred to the role of race in achieving one's goals. Children received messages about having to work "twice as hard" due to their racial identity, at the same time that they were being told they "could be and do whatever they set their minds to." The existence of this co-narrative is particularly striking as much of the literature on West Indian immigrants depicts first-generation West Indians as downplaying their racial identity in favor of their ethnic identity (Foner 1985, 1987; Kasinitz 1992; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999). Instead, it appears that although members of the first generation often resisted identifying with African Americans, they were, nevertheless, well aware of how the American racial classification system worked and how it might impact the life chances of their children. Demali,[21] a twenty-year-old college student, elaborated:

> My parents would often act like it didn't matter that I was black or not, that I could do whatever I wanted . . . which is crazy since we were so broke, but hey. . . . They never tried to limit me, but they did remind me that [I] would have to be twenty times better than white people if I wanted to get anywhere. . . . So, while we weren't necessarily caught up with being black, my family did acknowledge that we were black and would talk about it. They just didn't want us to be seen like African Americans.

Demali's comments reflect the ways in which West Indian parents construct a narrative for their children that is at once proactive in relation to future achievement and reactive in regards to perceived racial discrimination. The first generation was cognizant of the fact that racial identity often supersedes other social identities and passed this belief to their children. Nigel, a thirty-year-old assistant principal at a public high school, recounted:

> I don't know why people keep talking about how much better West Indians are than African Americans . . . cuz my dad would always say that to white people, we were only one step above black Americans. He told me that white ladies clutch their bags just as easily around us as they do them [African Americans]. So my parents constantly harassed us about how we dressed, spoke, and made sure that school was our top priority. They thought if we looked the part, and had a good education, we would be less likely to be discriminated against.

As these quotes make clear, the social identity conferred by race-tempered conceptions of opportunity and strategies of mobility given West Indians' placement in America's inequitable social structure. All of the respondents disagreed with their parents' opinions of and behaviors toward African Americans (which I will address in depth in the following section), but they appreciated their parents' honesty about the power of race in shaping their future.

The tensions between these voluntary and involuntary minorities are in many ways just as Ogbu's cultural ecological theory would lead us to expect. But what conclusions are we to draw regarding the children of these two categories of immigrants and their relation to educational institutions and to their peers? Both first-generation West Indians and African Americans have passed their attitudes on to their children, who now confront one another in school. In what ways are social constructs such as race, blackness, and community defined and redefined in school settings? More importantly, how do these social constructs require us to reevaluate the distinctions that Ogbu has drawn between voluntary and involuntary immigrants in relation to how they interpret and respond to social mobility and educational norms for success? The next section examines how peer interactions affect both perceptions of opportunity and educational attainment for the second generation.

PEER GROUPS: FRIENDS OR FOES?

The literature on school achievement notes the importance of peer influence on attitudes toward and behaviors in school (Carter 1999; Lew 2004; MacLeod 1995). For the second-generation respondents, peer groups were

sources of both pride and ridicule at different points in their school careers. They recalled being accused of "dressing and talking funny," "listening to crazy music," and not being familiar with "black" culture. This section examines the second generation's experiences in predominantly black and predominantly white school settings and tracks the respondents' efforts as adolescents to be both academically successful and "authentically black."

The Battle of the Ethnic Groups: Predominantly Black School Settings

Half the respondents in the sample had attended predominantly black elementary and high schools. Many talked of initial struggles with African American students around issues of culture, such as language and style of dress. Aubrey, a thirty-year-old paralegal recalled:

> I got jumped the first day of school when I started the third grade. People thought I talked funny, and then my mom put me in these crazy clothes. The clothes would have been fine for Guyana, but not for central Brooklyn. . . . I thought that everything would have been cool because we was all black, but clearly that was not the case. Needless to say, I told my mom to stop putting me in country clothes and shop at the stores that other people's parents went to. Oh . . . and I lost my accent right quick.

Sociologist Prudence Carter has found that low-income African American youth "set boundaries to acquire status among themselves to ward off outsiders . . . as they laid these symbolic boundaries, they also evaluated which of their co-ethnics was most worthy of "black" cultural membership based on their use of specified resources" (2003, p. 142). The data in this study reveal a similar phenomenon during initial interactions between African American and second-generation West Indian youths. The African Americans used particular cultural cues, such as speech patterns and tastes in food and music, to draw boundaries between themselves and the West Indians. In these moments, second-generation students attempted to lose their cultural markers so that they could fit in with the larger student body and be regarded as authentically black. This did not necessarily entail compromising their academic ideals or performance in any way. When I asked Aubrey how trying to adapt to American culture had affected his schoolwork, he replied thoughtfully:

> One thing doesn't have anything to do with the other. I knew that no matter how I dressed or spoke, I still had to do well. . . . I wasn't stupid. . . . I knew who I had to go home to at the end of the day, and what was expected of me. Plus, you forget, everybody in there was black, so

> what, we weren't going to work hard? A lot of us worked our butts off! I mean, somebody had to get good grades . . . and years before that my mama told me that was going to be me!

Aubrey's comments reveal the factors he saw as essential to his performance in school: his interactions with his mother and her conceptions of achievement and the fact that black students in the school did not regard good grades as undesirable.

Aubrey was on the older end of the sample's age range. He and his parents had migrated to New York in 1971. The family settled in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn, where Aubrey was one of only a few West Indian children in the neighborhood.[22] He mentioned that when he began his education, his school was not only predominantly black, but also predominantly African American. Brooklyn has long been understood to be home to multiple West Indian ethnic enclaves, but as Aubrey's experiences reveal, time, place, and space play key roles in racial and ethnic group interactions.

The student body was more racially and ethnically mixed at the high school level. Colin, a twenty-two-year-old college student who attended the same high school as Aubrey had, remembered the atmosphere:

> When I got to that school, there were mad West Indians up in there. I heard it used to have only African Americans, but we wrecking shop over there now. It's crazy though . . . when I first started over there, kids were split . . . you know, African Americans on one side, West Indians on the other, and then the Haitians—who knows where.[23] [Laughs] . . . Lunch was always battle of the bands because the African Americans would be playing rap and hip-hop, and we'd be blasting reggae and soca.

The critical mass of West Indian immigrants in Bedford-Stuyvesant did more than change the ethnic composition of the student body at Colin and Aubrey's high school. It also changed the ways in which blackness came to be understood. The "unified" West Indian group in the cafeteria also reveals how a group with similar experiences yet different backgrounds often will come together for the sake of real (or perceived) competition.

Colin went on to explain that when African Americans were not their reference point, the West Indian students spent their time arguing with one another about who came from the "better" island and had the "better" music. However, when confronted with a group deemed as culturally different from their own, the second generation reverted to a "survival of the fittest" attitude. Colin recalled that "the real competition was in class":

> You know, West Indians got so much damn pride that they would try to get the best grades to make the African Americans look bad. Then the

> African Americans stepped their game up because they didn't want us to make them look like shit. I guess it worked out for everybody in the end.

For these students, academic achievement was reinforced through ethnic competition. It was evident to both West Indians and African Americans that "doing well" was something open to all students rather than just to members of a particular racial or ethnic group. In fact, according to Colin, students who did not at least strive for good grades often were stigmatized and accused of belonging to the "other" ethnic group:

> [I]f fools didn't even study or anything, we would accuse them of acting like an African American, and they would do the same to us . . . nobody wanted dead weight.

Of course, not all students engaged in this kind of one-upmanship, but Colin's recollections indicate that the school provided an environment where the definition of blackness included high academic performance. Generally, Colin understood "blackness" as simply a function of skin color and the ability to trace one's heritage back to the African continent. However, he also argued that for nonblack people, and specifically for white people, blackness carried a host of other images and impressions, including inherent laziness, poverty, and most of all, lack of intelligence. Educational achievement was one way to actively fight against stigmatization.

In addition to altering perceptions of achievement, the presence of a large number of West Indians at the school compelled all students to revise their constructions of blackness to include multiple ways of being. Sheila, a twenty-four-year-old private secretary who also had attended a predominantly black high school, remembered the point at which she had realized the fundamental differences between West Indians and African Americans:

> When I got to high school and learned about the Civil Rights Movement . . . you know, beyond MLK . . . I didn't know much about it before I started class. All my African American friends had some knowledge about it, and some of their parents had participated in the marches. . . . I always felt like I missed something really important to my history as a black person in this country. . . . So when my African Americans friends say that they do not have an ethnicity, I tell them that yeah, they do. . . . We are all black, but we are not all African American. . . . There is still a southern culture that I am trying to learn about in the same way that they are learning about the history of the Caribbean.

Sheila's comments capture some of the ways in which the second generation's conceptions of themselves in relation to African Americans differed

from their parents' attitudes. "Black" became an umbrella term, encompassing all persons of African ancestry. It also came to imply

> a particular kind of struggle that goes with living in this racist society . . . which is why we always got to do our best, so they don't have more reason not to like us.

At the same time, Sheila's invoking of "they" and "us" suggests the ways in which members of the second generation reinforce the lessons they learned from their parents: perceptions of success often remain mediated by race.

"Us" vs. "Them": Predominantly White School Settings

One-third of the sample had attended predominantly white schools.[24] These respondents, like those who attended predominantly black institutions, were confronted with issues of achievement and "authenticity," albeit in a starkly different manner. Second-generation students in predominantly white schools encountered issues of race almost immediately upon entering school. Mervis, a twenty-six-year-old teacher at a private suburban high school, recounted her first impressions:

> By the second week of school, I noticed that all the black kids were in the same classes, and they were all low-level classes. Actually, I remember walking into my honors history class and the teacher telling me that I was in the wrong room. Ol' girl hadn't even asked me my name yet, she just knew that I wasn't supposed to be there by looking at me.

Numerous respondents told me stories similar to Mervis's. From their perspective, the teachers' racist ideology was evident not only in the tracking process, but also in their interpersonal interactions with black students. Teachers frequently made erroneous assumptions about black students' intellect. As one of two students (out of an entering class of 500) who had won academic scholarships to the school, Mervis was especially indignant about the treatment she had received from her teacher. Her outrage at the teacher's behavior is still apparent:

> [W]hat, do black girls not take honors classes? I don't know what pissed me off more . . . that someone challenged MY intelligence or the fact that they had stigmatized the entire race.

Second-generation West Indians in predominately white schools frequently found themselves trying to cope with situations similar to the one Mervis described. For school agents, students' racial identity seemed to take

precedence over all else, including their academic performance. Many respondents noted that they had been tracked into the wrong courses, often without ever having had the opportunity to take a placement exam. Others recalled having been held to harsher grading standards than their white counterparts. Some, such as Everald, a twenty-seven-year-old computer programmer, continued to be steered away from high academic performance, even while taking college-track courses. Everald had been encouraged to follow the stereotypic path of the athletic black male.

> I know that the teachers didn't think we were capable of getting good grades. More than one teacher asked me if I was considering a basketball career because I was so tall. Were they asking the white boys that? Hell no!

His experiences clearly illuminate the ways in which "schools and school personnel serve as a location and means for interracial interaction and a means of both affirming and challenging previous racial attitudes and understandings" (Lewis 2003, p. 4).

The circumstances second-generation West Indians faced in school might reasonably have prompted them to modify their conceptions of achievement. The respondents, though, seem to have taken a different tack. Everald described their common strategy this way:

> I knew that they were going to make me work harder for my grades than the white students, but I decided to take them up on it. Cuz who was going to tell my mother that the reason I wasn't doing as well was because my teacher was racist? I wasn't even sure that she would believe me.[25] So, I got together with the some of my black friends and we formed a study group and studied like you wouldn't believe. Teachers found it hard to argue with a perfect paper or a hundred on a test. But then again . . . a few of us were suspected of cheating.

That some of the high-achieving black students were suspected of cheating reveals how deeply ingrained the racist ideology was at Everald's school. Intelligent black students were not even considered the exceptions that proved the rule; they were perceived as simply not capable of attaining such high scores. Everald contended that none of the high-achieving white students was ever accused of cheating. "Because we were black," he surmised, "more than one of us at a time couldn't possible know the right answer."

Interestingly, Everald's strategy of forming a study group was a more common response than I would have initially predicted. Other respondents who had taken similar steps attributed their action to "doing what they had to" to ensure their own academic success. Some respondents had consulted older

black students and received advice and/or tutoring on how to maneuver through the school.

Respondents such as Everald viewed their struggle with white teachers and white peers as fighting against the widespread stereotypes of black students as low- and underachieving. Their efforts to redefine others' conceptions of "authentic" Black students demonstrate that many different attitudes about achievement exist within the black community, much as they do in the white community. The proactive approach to their education these students took was particularly striking because the black portion of the school's student body consisted of both second-generation West Indians and African Americans. In the predominately black high school Aubrey and Colin attended, the West Indians and African Americans had used competition with one another as incentives to do well. In the predominantly white context, the groups overlooked their ethnic differences and aided one another in the quest for academic achievement. The competitive factor was still there. Only the reference group changed. Mervis, recalling the competition, commented:

> I don't know if they [the white students] knew it or not, but we [the black students] were always competing with them. . . . There were five people that I hung with, and we would always try to get higher grades than the white kids in our classes . . . if all of us didn't get the top grades, it had to be at least one of us. I know it wasn't right, but hey, . . . it made us better students, I think. What's funny is that after a while teachers and students just accepted that we were smart . . . but I knew there were still limits. For example, some white boys would always try to get some of us to cut class with them. We were cool and all, but I knew that there were still some things that I couldn't get away with because of what I looked like.

As this quote shows, peer interaction can facilitate school achievement. The second generation entered school with a belief in the dominant ideology of success. When they encountered racism and prejudice, contrary to the conventional wisdom, they did not abandon their beliefs but instead clung to them even more passionately. Certainly, not all black students engaged in "retaliatory" achievement strategies, but neither did those who chose other responses make any effort to discourage their classmates from pursuing high performance. Everald recalled an explicitly supportive atmosphere:

> Sure there were a lot of black kids who did not want to be down with the study groups or tutors. I guess they were happy with the grades that they got. But they were mad cool about us trying to get our work done. . . . When the honor rolls came out every term and some of us we on them, the rest of the folks would be cheering for us and yelling at us that we were "representing" for the whole group . . . you know how it is . . . we were cool . . . for nerds, anyway.

Everald's statement belies the argument (Fordham and Ogbu 1986) that black underperforming students disparage black high-achieving students for acting white. This example illustrates the importance of context in the applicability of the acting-white hypothesis. In addition, Everald's use of the word "nerd" implies an identity inherently linked to academic performance, but with no specific racial connotation. Anyone can be a nerd.

IT'S WHO YOU KNOW: ETHNIC SOCIAL NETWORKS

Immigration research has documented the impact of ethnic networks on employment within Asian and Latino communities (Portes 1995; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes & Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1994; Tuan 1998) and on educational achievement, most especially among Asians (Lee 2004; Lew 2004; Louie 2004a, 2004b; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Zhou 1997; Zhou and Bankston 1994, 1998). With the notable exception of Bashi (1997, 1998b), little attention has been focused on how ethnic social networks serve West Indian immigrants and their children in regard to either employment or education. Respondents in my sample, particularly those of low income, reported that ethnic social networks provided resources that were critically important in helping them navigate the educational terrain.

Demali, the twenty-year-old college student quoted earlier, recounted how her father's social network had provided her with crucial academic help:

> If my dad didn't have that friend from work whose son went to Brooklyn Tech,[26] I wouldn't even known about it. My dad just came home one day talking about how I should go there because it was a good school. I remember that I asked one of the counselors at school about it, and she told me that it wasn't for me . . . which was crap because I knew that I had the grades. After that, I had my father have his friend introduce me to his son. It worked out great cuz he sat me down and told me about the entrance exam, how to study for it, and what to expect when I got there.

Demali's educational trajectory would have been very different had her father not befriended a fellow Jamaican at work. Her story also highlights the fact that black students' aspirations for achievement are sometimes hostage to factors beyond their control. Respondents frequently mentioned that as students they (much like their African American counterparts) had been

steered away from certain high schools/colleges by teachers and/or guidance counselors.

Other low-income respondents spoke of learning about educational programs through social networks outside of school. Typically, this happened when a family member was a teacher or knew of a teacher who had access to information about programs for city kids. Aubrey elaborated:

> When I was in high school, I remember going to this program in advanced math and science at City College. Now, I lived in Brooklyn, so what was I doing up in Harlem every Saturday morning for a month, you may ask? Yeah, that's right, every Saturday morning nine to eleven when other kids was in they beds. . . . My mom heard it about it from my aunt who taught up in Harlem. They decided that even though the program was only supposed to be for kids who went to school in Harlem, I needed to be there. . . . At first I hated going because I hated getting out of bed, but the classes were so hard that it became a challenge for me to pass the course . . . and in a good way. I can honestly say that I still use some of the things that I learned in that class today.

Aubrey is only one of many respondents who mentioned utilizing programs in New York City to further their education, a course of action that often involved sacrifice (e.g., less time for sleep, less time with friends).

Middle-class members of the second generation also made use of their social networks, but they did so more systematically than did the low-income respondents. Alecia, a twenty-five-year-old law student, explained how her family's network functioned:

> I don't remember what started it, but in my junior year of high school my mother and I started spending a lot of time with her Caribbean friends and their kids. I wasn't sure what the point was, but we went to museums, libraries, Broadway shows, and the movies together. It was kind of cool to do that, even though I didn't always feel like going. The best part of those ladies was that once they had some college student . . . another Jamaican, of course, come by and tell us about different colleges, how to apply, what admissions committees looked for . . . you name it . . . everything we needed to know done in about three sessions. . . . Now that I think about it, she even tutored me for my SATs.

Given that Alecia was from a middle-class background, she would likely have had access to resources for pertinent college information. However, the presence of the Jamaican college student was a concrete way to reinforce the viability of academic achievement. In addition, the other second-generation West Indians in the group served as a support network during the college application process. What is most striking about this narrative is how closely the behaviors of this informal group of families resemble those of the African American organization, Jack & Jill.[27] Adult members of that organization similarly employ the particular resources at their disposal to facilitate upward mobility for their children.

For both low-income and middle-class respondents, ethnic social networks provided the second generation with access to opportunities for mobility. While these networks did not necessarily buffer the respondents from instances of prejudice and discrimination, they did offer ways to circumvent racism's negative effects.

CONCLUSION

This research addressed second-generation West Indian immigrants' perceptions of opportunity and the mechanisms of achievement that they used. Although the study was based on a small regional sample of second-generation West Indian young adults, the findings do raise questions about the current state of knowledge about West Indian students' relationship to academic institutions, the experiences of voluntary versus involuntary minorities, and the dominant view of black students in general as culturally opposed to academic achievement. The data presented here also demonstrate the ways in which social constructs such as race, blackness, and community are defined and redefined in school settings.

While John Ogbu's (1974, 1978) cultural ecological theory (CET) suggested that children of voluntary immigrants would follow in the path of their parents and acquiesce to racial prejudice and discrimination, the present study suggests that the opposite is actually occurring. Armed with messages from their parents about the significance of their racial identity while confronting various racial barriers, second-generation West Indians are utilizing multiple academic coping strategies. Context-specific conceptions of achievement, particularly peer groups located in predominantly black and predominantly white institutions, as well as ethnic social networks, play a central role in the development of attitudes toward achievement. The study indicates that the second generation developed a variety of individual and collective strategies to stave off the negative effects of discrimination. The combined influence of peer groups, student-teacher interactions, and ethnic social networks facilitated high aspirations and educational achievement. This would imply that a conceptualization of attitudes toward achievement is part of a social, contextual process rather than a specifically cultural one delineated by (im)migration status. Therefore, while the CET model as it relates to voluntary and involuntary minorities has some merits, it appears to be less useful for explaining the experiences of children of black immigrants.

The respondents presented in this study shared common attitudes toward education and articulated similar approaches to academic achievement, regardless of their class status. Given the heterogeneity of the West Indian population, however, this study makes no claim to have captured ideas and experiences shared by all members of the second generation. There are those for whom positive academic outcomes have not been attainable. Under what conditions can some individuals actualize their goals, but others cannot? The concept of acting white and its associated burdens did not resonate with any respondent in my study, but this notion may nevertheless be valid for other students, in other contexts.

Important research still needs to be conducted with this population. Future research questions should consider the following: Given that immigrant children and children of immigrants currently constitute the majority population in several metropolitan New York public schools, how does this translate into perceptions of opportunity? Do these conceptions of achievement carry over into later (i.e., college) years? What are the ways in which perceptions of opportunity change over time? How are any changes in attitudes toward achievement related to confrontations with racialized barriers? Additional research needs to further explore the ways in which social identities, familial experience, and collective group consciousness interact with institutions to shape narratives of opportunity and academic engagement for both voluntary and involuntary immigrants. Considering that immigration is continuing at a rapid rate, studying the experiences and attitudes of second-generation immigrants in relation to academic achievement may provide a lens by which to better understand how schools can serve current and future students.

NOTES

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1. I use the term "African American" to refer to U.S. native-born Blacks whose mother and father also are U.S. native-born Blacks.
2. In these studies, "culture" is defined as constituting a way of life of an entire group that includes codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, norms of behavior, and systems of belief.
3. For a more extensive treatment of CET, see Ogbu (2003) or O'Connor, Horvat, and Lewis's introductory chapter to this volume.

4. Numerous studies address the impact of ethnicity on immigrant youth's educational aspirations and achievement (e.g., Kao, Tienda, & Schneider 1996; Matute-Bianchi 1986; Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva 1994; Portes & MacLeod 1996; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 1995). However, none of this research specifically investigates the experiences of black immigrant youth. Kasinitz, Battle, and Ines (2001) and Waters (1999, 2001) examine the educational experiences of West Indian youth, but they do not focus on achievement and perceptions of opportunity.
5. In fact, my data suggest that even first-generation West Indians do not view racial barriers as temporary in any way, but something that can be mediated with a good education and other forms of cultural capital.
6. I would argue that a more valid comparison would pair West Indians with another immigrant group (of color) rather than with a native-born group. The selectivity of migration skews the findings in favor of West Indians when the comparison group is native born. It is only recently that researchers have begun assessing West Indians in relation to another black immigrant group—Africans (see Dodoo 1997; Logan & Deane 2003). Interestingly, African Americans continue to be included in these analyses.
7. Most scholarship on the second generation has been speculative (Foner 1978, 1985; Gans 1992; Portes & Zhou 1993) because it is only recently that children of post-1965 immigrants have reached an age where it would be appropriate to analyze their mobility paths.
8. It is important to note that sociologists Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut (2001) have conducted in-depth studies on the attitudes and belief systems of the second generation in relation to opportunity and achievement, but they primarily focused on the Latino and Asian adolescent second generation.
9. The upper end of the age range of the sample was set at thirty-two because this was the oldest a child born to post-1965 immigrants could have been at the time the larger study (of which the work reported here is a part) began. The lower end of the age range is meant to capture those now coming into full adulthood and thus primarily responsible for their own lives (younger respondents may still rely on parents or guardians). This age category also encompasses individuals who, although still young, have experienced some socioeconomic advantages and/or disadvantages in the labor market (Mollenkopf, Kasinitz, & Waters 1995).
10. The metropolitan New York area served as my research site due to its absorption of a disproportionately high percentage of the nation's West Indian immigrants. (Census estimates indicate that nearly 40 percent of the city's black population is of West Indian ancestry.) Given the number of West Indian immigrants, in addition to the large numbers of other immigrants of color, and combined with an already significant African American and native White population, New York provides a unique context by which to explore interracial and interethnic interaction. West Indian immigrants and their children have been transforming, and are being transformed by, New York's system of race and ethnic relations. Their presence underscores the way blackness is being renegotiated in an increasingly multiethnic black community both locally and nationally. Moreover, because West Indians are closely identified with, and often live in neighboring areas to, African Americans, examining their experience in New York illuminates the complex ways that West Indians utilize their ethnicity in various contexts.

11. One of my initial respondents was a Brooklyn party promoter and DJ who used his connections to aid me in recruiting additional respondents. This approach helped me reach communities of people I would not likely have had access to through my own networks.

12. For more on the importance of neighborhood location and composition for West Indian immigrants and their children, see Crowder and Tedrow (2001).

13. My examination of ethnic identity and its significance for second-generation West Indian immigrants (Butterfield 2001) looks at the ways in which West Indians define themselves; how these identities influence their social behavior, networks, and attitudes; and how they define the membership boundaries of their group (Barth 1969; Nagel 1994; Waters 1990). In evaluating the salience of ethnic identity, I also use measures drawn from other studies, including preferences for and use of home country language/style of speech, preference for doing business with co-ethnics, church membership or religious affiliation, participation in voluntary organizations, and participation in events and activities sponsored by such organizations (Alba 1985; Nagel 1994; Waters 1990).

14. Almost half of the Panamanian immigrants to the United States are of Jamaican descent (Waters 1999).

15. I also included those respondents who immigrated to the United States before the age of twelve—the group Rumbaut (1991) classified as the "1.5 generation."

16. Specifically, those who lived in the City resided in central Brooklyn, northern Bronx, the upper west side of Manhattan (mainly Harlem), and southeast Queens.

17. Regardless of the site of the interview, I used a one-to-one, interactive interview format with each respondent.

18. Fifty-four percent of the sample had either a college degree or some college experience. The high level of education among the sample can be attributed to the relatively easy access to college provided by the City University of New York. Immigrants and their children predominate in the CUNY system's student body (Mollenkopf, Kasinitz, & Waters 1995).

19. For the first generation, this is true regardless of socioeconomic status; this pattern of attitudes and behavior is not unique to West Indians, however. Many immigrants view their native-born counterparts as "too Americanized" and as not sufficiently hardworking.

20. Ironically, West Indian immigrants are increasingly coming to be identified as having these same negative traits (Butterfield 2001).

21. All names and any identifying characteristics that might compromise the respondents' anonymity have been changed.

22. Aubrey's experience contrasts significantly with that of respondents who grew up in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn during the 1970s, where incoming West Indians quickly outnumbered African American and white residents. The uniqueness of Flatbush is further confirmed by older respondents who grew up in the Bronx, Queens, Long Island, and Newark, all of whom described their families as being one of the few West Indian families in the area during their childhood.

23. As respondents reflected on their educational pasts, it became clear that Haitians were the group most frequently maligned by both West Indians and African Americans. I asked follow-up questions, but no one seemed able to provide a definitive reason for this targeting.

24. All respondents who had attended predominantly white institutions had gone to parochial schools. The remaining 17 percent of the sample had attended racially and ethnically heterogeneous schools. That 17 percent of the sample is not included in the analysis presented in this chapter.

25. Versions of Everald's comment were independently articulated by many other respondents. Parents seem to have initially blindly trusted the schools to operate in the best interest of their children. If students were doing poorly in school, their parents would accuse them of not trying hard enough. Several respondents noted, however, that after they had recounted multiple stories of the unequal treatment they received in school, their parents had, more often than not, interceded with the teachers and/or principal.

26. Considered one of the city's finest high schools, Brooklyn Technical High School is one of three specialized public high schools in New York. It is known for placing its graduates in some of the best colleges in the country. Competition for admission is quite fierce.

27. Jack & Jill is an organization for middle- and upper-class African American children. It facilitates exposure to other African Americans through a variety of social and service activities.

III

THE STRUCTURING OF RACE AND MATERIAL INEQUITIES

6

Reconsidering "Material Conditions": How Neighborhood Context Can Shape Educational Outcomes across Racial Groups

James W. Ainsworth and Greg Wiggan

In the late 1970s, John Ogbu (1978) shifted the debate about school performance. He argued that students from historically oppressed groups engage in a kind of agency by resisting the achievement ideology *because of* racism and racial stratification in the social and economic system.[1] These students, he theorized, perceive their limited access to education, employment, economic opportunities, and social advancement as due to racial barriers. He noted, as well, that in addition to a racialized political system characterized by hegemony and white domination, neighborhoods and residential patterns create resistance in students. Drawing attention to the link between structure and agency at the individual level was a major contribution. Over time, however, Ogbu's prescriptions (and their implications for policy) have attended less and less to the need for structural changes in the social system. Rather, his recent solutions focused primarily on getting students and their parents to acquire the attitudes and habits that white Americans value. For example, in his latest book he advised black families to "assume a proactive role to increase the academic orientation, effort, and performance of their children," noting that "the academic achievement gap is not likely to be closed by restructuring the educational system or by what the schools . . . can do for black students" (2003, p. 274).

Ogbu posited that students with an involuntary minority status respond to racial discrimination in the opportunity structure and the reward system in racialized ways. The students' behaviors are a reaction to perceived racial discrimination; cumulatively, they form what Ogbu calls an oppositional identity. Students' reactions contribute to a culture that is both anti-achievement and anti-intellectual. Ogbu focused on what he viewed as the negative culture of

black students, bringing his thesis very close to a culture-of-poverty argument (Lundy 2003). Because he perceived low achievement as resulting from students' own actions (i.e., their embrace of oppositional culture), Ogbu directed his prescriptions toward the students themselves, rather than linking his recommendations to larger social structures.

Research by others shows that African American high school students, contrary to Ogbu's oppositional culture theory, tend to have more positive school-related attitudes than white students (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey 1998; Cook & Ludwig 1997; Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell 2002). However, these positive attitudes are associated with less positive school-related behaviors than those exhibited by white students. Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) point to differential "material conditions" as the cause of variations in school-related behaviors and individual outcomes across racial groups. In this chapter, we discuss how one dimension of material conditions, neighborhood context, may lead to racial differences in educational performance.[2] Drawing heavily on William Julius Wilson's (1987, 1991, 1996) social disorganization/social isolation theory, we identify five neighborhood mechanisms: collective socialization, social control, social capital/social networks, limited occupational opportunity, and institutional characteristics. We then examine how each can shape educational outcomes across racial groups. Lastly, we encourage new directions and perspectives in neighborhood research and offer suggestions for policymakers.

RECONSIDERING OGBU'S OPPOSITIONAL CULTURE THEORY: POSITIVE AGENCY AND MICRO-MACRO LINKAGES

Our proposed theoretical alternative to oppositional culture theory incorporates both positive and negative agency into students' perceptions of school success, and emphasizes prescriptions that link structure and agency (see figure 6.1). Rather than assuming that black students will have a negative reaction to racial discrimination in the social and economic system, this approach views student resistance as positively related to achievement, where students view school success as a means of social mobility. Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) found that black students had more pro-school attitudes than their white counterparts. Furthermore, Cook and Ludwig (1997) found that black and white students had equally high educational expectations. These empirical findings are consistent with other research, which indicates that black students engage in positive agency by giving greater educational effort (Hilliard 1995; Lundy 2003; O'Connor 1997; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard 2003). While some students may resist school success, this behavior may be the result of differences in social class and material conditions, rather than being the racialized reaction Ogbu proposed.[3]

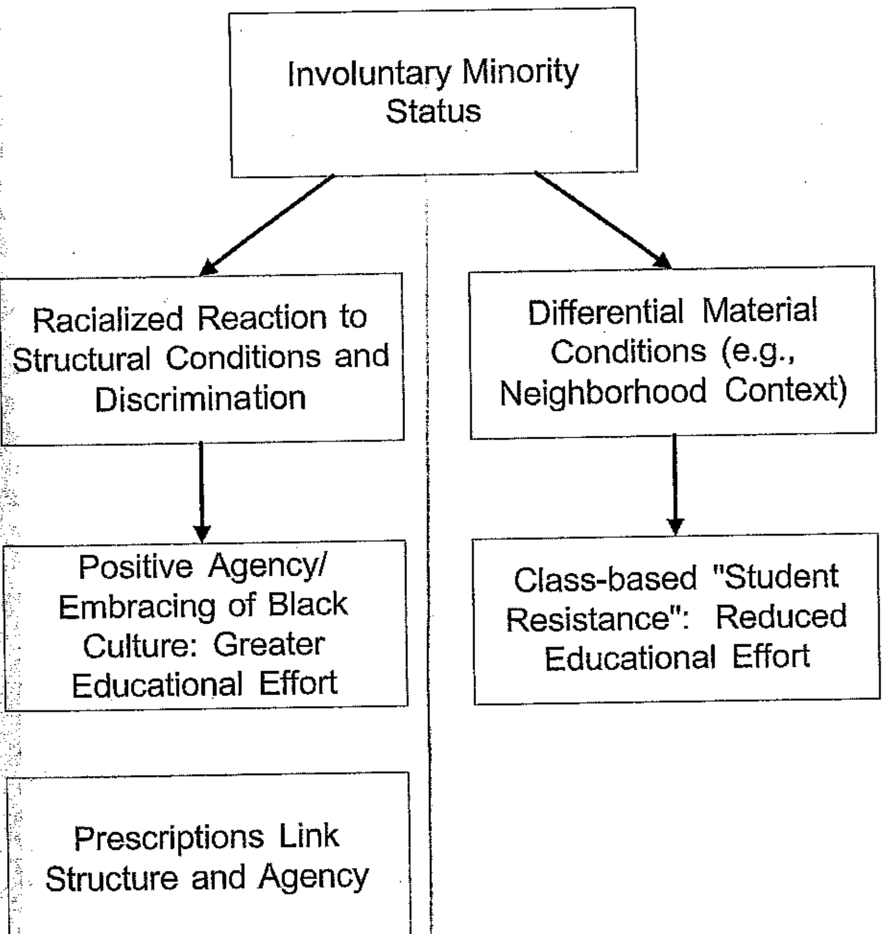

Figure 6.1. Theoretical Alternative to Ogbu's Oppositional Culture Theory

Ogbu's argument, despite its popular appeal (which further increased when he and Fordham [1986] articulated the notion of the "burden of acting white"), is problematic on several counts. MacLeod (1995) shows that resistance to the ideology of achievement is not unique to minorities; poor white students are similarly resistant. Tyson (2002) finds that black students are achievement oriented, that the varying school experiences of black students shape the development of school-related attitudes (rather than all Blacks responding to school in a similar fashion), and that oppositional culture theory is "less useful for explaining the underachievement of middle-class Black students" (p. 1184). Carter (2003) provides evidence that acting white is

more closely related to speech, dress, musical tastes, and styles of interaction than it is to academic achievement. Furthermore, Lundy (2003) argues that rather than rejecting academic success, many black students see high achievement as cultural agency and resistance to white supremacy. Similarly, O'Connor (1997) concludes that some African American students, armed with knowledge of how a collective black struggle can combat racial oppression, develop the agency necessary for engaging successfully in school.

These and similar studies demonstrate that students' awareness of structural inequalities (e.g., racism, discrimination, sexism, etc.) that place minorities at a social and economic disadvantage does not necessarily result in anti-achievement dispositions. Rather, students may engage themselves in school with the hope of producing positive change (Hilliard 1995). These findings diverge from Ogbu's arguments that students disengage from schools and other institutions that reflect or contribute to racism and social inequality. Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) and Ainsworth (2002) argue that minority students generally report high levels of pro-school attitudes. In addition, they note that oppositional peer culture is not specifically related to school achievement. It may be, as Carter (2003) has found, invoked when minority students adopt the language, music, and attire of the dominant group.

The relative influence of micro- and macro-level processes, agency, and structure on students' performance continues to be hotly debated in the literature on achievement. Ogbu's arguments and those of researchers in the same tradition, like McWhorter (2000), have a mass appeal, perhaps because they seem to hold students responsible for school failure without reaching back to implicate the social structures that create inequality in the educational system. The aim of this chapter is to help bring structure back into the student achievement debate by looking at neighborhood processes as a structural condition that affects students' performance.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT AS ONE ASPECT OF MATERIAL CONDITIONS

Research suggests that concentration of poverty in urban areas intensified during the 1970s (Massey & Eggers 1993; Wilson 1996) and became extreme during the 1980s (Coulton, Pandey, & Chow 1990; Kasarda 1993; Krivo et al. 1998). By 1990, two in five urban census tracts had at least a 20 percent poverty rate, and one in seven had poverty rates over 40 percent (Kasarda 1993). This disturbing trend has prompted renewed interest in the effects of neighborhood-level conditions on individual-level outcomes. A prominent concern is that high levels of neighborhood poverty, combined with race and class residential segregation, promote a wide variety of negative behaviors and attitudes (Massey & Denton 1993; Massey, Gross & Eggers 1991; Wilson 1987, 1996). As Massey, Gross, and Eggers (1991) argue, "since people who occupy the same space are likely to interact frequently and intensely, neighborhoods have a profound effect on the values, beliefs, and knowledge of the people who grow up and live within them" (p. 398).

One dramatic way in which neighborhoods may affect social mobility and quality of life is through their influence on the educational outcomes of young residents. Dropout rates in severely distressed neighborhoods are more than three times higher than those in nonpoverty-stricken neighborhoods, and jobless rates for young high school dropouts in distressed urban neighborhoods often are over 80 percent (Kasarda 1993). Although numerous studies have detailed the causes of concentrated urban poverty and explored its association with behavioral outcomes (Fainstein 1986–1987; Farley 1988; Hughes 1989; Jargowsky & Bane 1991; Massey & Denton 1993; Wilson 1987, 1996), empirical research generally has neglected the processes through which neighborhood disadvantage influences individual and group behavior (for recent notable exceptions, see Ainsworth [2002], South & Baumer [2000], and Turley [2003]), let alone how these processes may differ across race. Unless we consider both structural and individual factors and their relationship to one another, our understanding of educational processes will remain incomplete, and our directives for bringing an end to chronic school failure will never achieve their goals. Fleshing out the degree to which neighborhood characteristics influence educational outcomes is key to understanding the processes that reproduce social inequality in general, as well as across racial groups. To this end, we delineate some neighborhood characteristics that influence educational outcomes, identify mechanisms that mediate these associations, and assess the degree to which students' race conditions the impact of neighborhood context.

WHICH NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS AFFECT EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES?

Although Wilson (1987, 1996) provides several theoretical reasons why neighborhood context should affect educational outcomes, until recently little empirical work had tested these connections. Steinberg (1989), for instance, reported that systematic studies of the relationship between families, neighborhoods, and education were "virtually nonexistent." A year later, Jencks and Mayer (1990) reviewed the literature and found only two studies, Datcher (1982) and Corcoran et al. (1987), addressing school and neighborhood effects on educational attainment and cognitive skills. Both studies report that positive neighborhood characteristics are related to gains in educational attainment.

Since Steinberg's assessment and Jencks and Mayer's review, a number of researchers have begun examining the impact of neighborhood characteristics on educational performance (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Catsambis & Beveridge 2001; Chase-Lansdale, & Gordon 1996; Chase-Lansdale et al. 1997; Connell & Halpern-Felsher 1997; Connell et al. 1995; Crane 1991; Dornbusch, Ritter, & Steinberg 1991; Duncan 1994; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov 1994; Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson 1996; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson 1994; Garner & Raudenbush 1991; Halpern-Felsher et al. 1997; Klebanov et al. 1997; Spencer et al. 1997; Turley 2003). One conclusion these empirical studies consistently support is that some aspects of the neighborhood influence educational success. Beyond this broad statement, however, determining the relative importance of neighborhood characteristics has been difficult because of inconsistencies in terms of which neighborhood characteristics are examined.

Most commonly, researchers look at indicators of neighborhood socioeconomic composition. Several studies find that children living in neighborhoods with affluent residents benefit educationally regardless of their own family's socioeconomic status. For example, the presence of high-status neighbors is associated with a lower probability of dropping out of high school (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Crane 1991), an increased likelihood of school completion (Duncan 1994 [for all groups except black males]; Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson 1996 [among male adolescents]), and higher test scores (Turley 2003). Moreover, high socioeconomic status neighbors are associated with positive school- and cognitive-related outcomes among young children (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov 1994; Klebanov et al. 1997).

Other studies, focusing on negative neighborhood characteristics, conclude that the presence of low socioeconomic status neighbors has a negative effect on students' educational and other related outcomes. For example, the presence of poor neighbors is a significant predictor of dropout status, although the size of this detrimental effect is considerably less than the beneficial effect of affluent neighbors (Clark 1992). In addition, the presence of poor neighbors is related to behavior problems among young children (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov 1994). Moreover, poor neighborhoods and neighborhoods with high levels of male joblessness are associated with less cognitively stimulating home environments (Klebanov et al. 1997).

Despite these gains in understanding in recent years, neighborhood research has yet to resolve many important issues related to the effects of neighborhood context on individual educational performance. Questions remain about which neighborhood characteristics matter most in terms of educational performance. Other issues, such as *how* neighborhood context affects educational outcomes, and whether neighborhood processes vary across racial groups, continue to be underinvestigated.

VARIATION IN NEIGHBORHOOD EFFECTS ACROSS RACES

While much of the neighborhood literature discussed above has focused on individual-level outcomes in general, the intent of Ogbu's oppositional culture theory is specific. It is meant to address *racial* differences in educational performance. Therefore, the questions we need to ask and answer are: Are children from different racial groups affected similarly by the neighborhood context in which they live?; and Do the mediating processes different for various racial groups?

Several studies suggest that neighborhood effects are stronger for white children than they are for black children (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Datcher 1982; Duncan 1994; Halpern-Felsher et al. 1997). Some report, for instance, that white teenagers are more likely to benefit from the presence of affluent neighbors, in terms of staying in school (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993) and educational attainment (Datcher 1982), than are black teenagers. Similarly, Halpern-Felsher et al. (1997) find that among early adolescents, white males demonstrate fewer educational risk behaviors when living in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of middle-class neighbors, and that among middle adolescents, all but black males benefit from high socioeconomic status neighbors in terms of number of years of schooling completed and educational risk behaviors.

Alternatively, some research suggests that Blacks are affected more strongly by neighborhood context than Whites (Chase-Lansdale & Gordon 1996; Duncan 1994; Halpern-Felsher et al. 1997). For instance, black males are more likely to drop out of high school if they live in a neighborhood that has a high proportion of black residents (Duncan 1994), and Blacks also are more likely to complete school when positive role models are present in their neighborhoods, but only if those role models are also black (Duncan 1994; Halpern-Felsher et al. 1997; Turley 2003). Furthermore, higher levels of behavior problems are reported among Blacks, but not Whites, in neighborhoods characterized by high rates of male joblessness (Chase-Lansdale & Gordon 1996).

Studies also support the position that Blacks and Whites are influenced by their neighborhood context, but the specific effects on each group vary because the two tend to reside in different types of neighborhoods. Dornbusch, Ritter, and Steinberg (1991) argue that Blacks and Whites are affected similarly by neighborhood problems, but that Blacks face more of these problems because they live in more disadvantaged neighborhoods than Whites. Klebenov et al. (1997) also suggest that racial differences in neighborhood effects vary depending on the type of neighborhood. Whites living in resource-poor neighborhoods receive greater returns from having high quality home environments, in terms of their verbal IQ scores and instances of behavioral problems, than do Blacks. Furthermore, Klebenov et al. suggest that such results

stem from the fact that black children, on average, live in poorer neighborhoods than do Whites.

Overall, the neighborhood literature suggests that Whites are more likely to benefit from living in advantaged neighborhoods, and that Blacks are more likely to suffer from living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. But are these types of racial differences the result simply of differences in the racial distribution across neighborhood types, or are neighborhood level processes racialized? The picture is muddled because there is a serious lack of empirical data that examine whether the processes through which neighborhoods shape individual level outcomes differ across racial groups. Even more limited is theorizing on this topic. Our focus on material conditions is not meant to deny that race and racism persists as important features in American life. They do. What neighborhood researchers have yet to address is how and why structural factors might differentially affect youth from different racial backgrounds.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXTUAL EFFECTS ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Wilson (1987, 1996) argues that the social isolation and disorganization experienced by inner-city residents (who are disproportionately black) results in major social problems, including a prevalence of delinquent subcultures, a weakening of basic institutions, and a lack of social control. These problems, in turn, contribute to residents' high rate of educational failure. According to Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986), socialization processes mediate neighborhood effects on individual outcomes to a large extent. This suggests that the common strategy of considering only direct effects of socialization should be rethought. Wilson and others have described five interrelated mechanisms through which neighborhood characteristics affect educational achievement: collective socialization, social control, social capital or social networks, differential occupational opportunity, and institutional (i.e., school) characteristics. We examine these processes and assess the degree to which they differ across racial groups.

Collective Socialization

According to Wilson (1996), neighborhood characteristics influence collective socialization processes by shaping the type of role models youth are exposed to outside the home. He believes that neighborhoods where most adults have steady jobs foster behaviors and attitudes conducive to success in both school and work. Working adults display such behaviors and attitudes as the association of effort with rewards, a stable daily routine, and

personal responsibility for one's actions. Children who live in this kind of environment are more likely to value education, adhere to school norms, work hard, and stay out of trouble because that is what they see modeled for them by neighborhood adults.

In neighborhoods where most adults do not work, Wilson argues, life can become "incoherent" for youths, due to the lack of structuring norms normally modeled by working adults (1991, p. 10). The specifically school-related behaviors and attitudes of youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods are likely to be conflicted because of the competing influence of mainstream ideological imperatives and structural constraints resulting from a lack of opportunity that prevents youth from reaching their goals (Anderson 1999). Wilson (1996) argues that the typical inner-city "ghetto" culture includes many elements of mainstream culture, including an achievement ideology that hard work in school will pay off in terms of a good job. The contention that "ghetto" residents adhere to the basic values of American society is also consistent with the findings of ethnographic studies (Anderson 1978, 1999; Hannerz 1969; Liebow 1967; MacLeod 1995; Rainwater 1966).

What sets residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods apart from other Americans is their inability to realize such ideals through legitimate means. Restricted opportunities and other social constraints stymie these residents' upward mobility (Massey & Denton 1993; Massey & Fong 1990; Wilson 1996).[4] According to Merton's strain theory (1938), the inability to access legitimate means for socially desirable ends is likely to produce innovative or structurally adaptive behaviors that are inconsistent with the values inner-city youth hold. For example, Anderson (1990) describes how black youths "grit" or "go for bad" as a defense mechanism to protect themselves from situations they perceive as dangerous. According to Anderson, "many black youths, law-abiding or otherwise, exude an offensive/defensive aura because they themselves regard the streets as a jungle" (p. 173). Thus, while some residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods may gain status by adhering to the mainstream ideology and by putting down their neighbors who do not (Wacquant 1996), others are likely to scorn conventional American values (Anderson 1990). As Massey and Denton (1993) put it,

> In response to the harsh and isolated conditions of ghetto life, a segment of the urban black population has evolved a set of behaviors, attitudes, and values that are increasingly at variance with those held in the wider society. . . . As a result, an alternative status system has evolved within America's ghettos that is defined *in opposition to* the basic ideals and values of American society. [pp. 165–167, emphasis is original]

Structurally adaptive behaviors and attitudes that discourage success in school and work are examples of divergent values that may emerge in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Hannerz 1969; Swidler 1986; Wilson 1996).

Specifically, in neighborhoods with weak labor force attachment, youth may perceive unemployment or underemployment as normative (Ricketts & Sawhill 1988; Wilson 1991). They are less likely to develop educationally beneficial skills (e.g., the ability to rationally plan their future) and attitudes (e.g., associating hard work with success), because neighborhood adults do not demonstrate these behaviors and beliefs. Moreover, with few real-life examples to confirm that hard work translates into success, children in disadvantaged neighborhoods are likely to feel powerless to control their own fate. They may lack confidence in their abilities or may judge the structural constraints too great to be overcome (Wilson 1991).[5]

Ainsworth (2002) concludes that collective socialization processes account for more of the neighborhood effect on educational performance than the other four mechanisms discussed below. Whether black and white students are affected similarly by neighborhood-level socialization remains open to debate, however. Two studies address this question directly. Turley (2003) finds that white students' test scores and behaviors improve as a result of living in neighborhoods with high proportions of high-status residents, but the same is not true for black students. Black students benefit only when the high-status residents were also black. South and Crowder (2000) found evidence of racial differences in socialization processes related to the timing of first marriage. They contend that residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods propels white residents into first marriages. African Americans who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods delay marriage.

Social Control

Neighborhood levels of social control, or the monitoring and sanctioning of deviant behavior, may indirectly influence local youths' educational performance. Wilson (1996) argues that inner-city black neighborhoods have experienced a recent exodus of middle-class and stable working-class families and an increase in single-parent families (also see Kasarda 1993). Such trends are apt to increase the child/adult ratios in these neighborhoods. With fewer adults per child, there is a greater risk of social disorganization (i.e., an inability to adequately monitor youth activities) because single parents tend to be less involved in neighborhood organizations such as schools. Thus, this change contributes to both social disorganization and a weakening of social control.

Steinberg (1987) cites three reasons why increased numbers of single-parent households result in less supervision of youths: there are fewer adults to monitor the activities of youths in general; working single parents may spend less time monitoring their own children's activities; and some adults

in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods may rationally choose to isolate themselves from their neighbors because they believe that interacting with them could be dangerous. The falloff in adult monitoring of youth activities in turn leads to an increase in deviant behavior because young peoples' problem behaviors are not sanctioned.

Neighborhoods with fewer adults also are likely to have fewer people involved in organizing community activities for neighborhood youth (Anderson 1990). Children in such communities have fewer choices about how to spend their time in constructive ways and therefore are more likely to take part in deviant activities (Wacquant 1996). With limited adult supervision, peer-group influences may become stronger relative to parental influence. If so, subcultures that resist mainstream (adult) culture—including school norms—are more likely to develop. Brody et al. (2001) provide supporting evidence for this perspective. They report that in small towns and rural areas, deviant behaviors resulting from structural problems are similar to those found in inner-city neighborhoods. Brody et al. maintain that children who live in disadvantaged communities, whether urban or rural, have a higher probability for antisocial behaviors. South, Baumer, and Lutz (2003) argue that neighborhood disadvantage impedes educational attainment because youth are placed into social networks that do not value academic achievement. Alternatively, Stewart, Simons, and Conger (2002) contend that living in a violent neighborhood does not produce violent children; in their view, micro-level effects of family, peers, and individual characteristics are more important considerations.

Social Capital/Social Networks

A third mechanism through which neighborhood context can influence educational outcomes involves the amount and quality of social capital (habitus and social networks) in a given community (Wilson 1996). Van Haitsma (1989) argues that all else being equal, larger social networks should be more beneficial than smaller social networks. Shaw and McKay (1942) postulate that informal local friendship networks are a key dimension of community organization; these networks increase the likelihood that community members will recognize strangers and exert social control over deviant behavior. Sampson and Groves (1989) provide support for this, noting that communities characterized by sparse friendship networks have higher crime and delinquency rates.

It follows that children who live in advantaged neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to helpful social networks, or to adults who can provide resources, information, and opportunities that may be educationally beneficial (e.g., the use of personal computers or other technology, job opportunities, or help with a science fair project), than are children from disadvantaged

neighborhoods. For example, Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) find that middle-class parents are more likely to react collectively to effectively use information, expertise, and authority to promote advantage for their children in school.[6] Furthermore, involved neighbors may act as positive role models for other neighborhood adults by encouraging them to support and mentor neighborhood children. Such adult involvement is likely to integrate children into mainstream culture and promote their academic success by exposing them to positive, pro-school role models and by limiting their involvement in anti-school peer-group cultures. Finally, social networks in this type of neighborhood are likely to transcend family effects, because adults outside the home help monitor neighborhood children (Wilson 1996). The social capital provided by neighborhood adults who support pro-schooling and pro-work norms will benefit local youths' educational outcomes.

Alternatively, individuals in impoverished neighborhoods may be disadvantaged not only by smaller social networks (Wacquant & Wilson 1989), but also by networks that are less beneficial, owing to the relatively low social position of their members (Sampson & Groves 1989). Ties to groups or individuals with few resources could be disadvantageous because those ties may represent obligations rather than opportunities to draw on each other's useful information and resources (Van Haitsma 1989). The importance of neighborhood context is further supported by Wilson's (1996) argument that in impoverished neighborhoods "children are disadvantaged because the social interaction among neighbors tends to be confined to those whose skills, styles, orientations, and habits are not as conducive to promoting positive social outcomes as are those in more stable neighborhoods" (p. 63).

Finally, in neighborhoods with widespread resistance to mainstream norms, strong social networks could prove detrimental to children's educational attainment because such neighborhoods would provide negative, anti-school role models and limited monitoring and sanctioning of problem behaviors. In such cases, intentional family-level social isolation may be an adaptive strategy to counteract negative neighborhood effects.

Limited Occupational Opportunity

Wilson (1996) also emphasizes the importance of occupational opportunity in structuring the lives of neighborhood youths. Several researchers have argued that perceptions of occupational opportunity positively affect educational outcomes (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey 1998; MacLeod 1995; Ogbu 1978; Willis 1977). While most students, regardless of their neighborhood type, are taught that anyone can be successful if they work hard enough, the degree to which this ideology is supported by adolescents' concrete experiences may vary by neighborhood context (Massey, Gross, & Eggers 1991; Turner et al. 1991; Wilson 1987). Lewin-Epstein

(1985) and Osterman (1980) report that labor markets for youths correspond closely with their neighborhood. The jobs available in a neighborhood thus shape adolescents' early occupational opportunities. Moreover, Neckerman and Kirscherman (1991) find that youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to face employment discrimination. They report that employers use a youth's residential address as a marker of reliability, productivity, and even race. Residential location alone thus can limit youths' chances for employment, regardless of their work ethic or positive employment track record. If students are motivated to succeed in school because they believe education will result in better employment, residence-based discrimination may erode or even eradicate this belief and undermine their academic effort.

Youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods are also more likely to have poor work histories. Typically, the few jobs available to them do not have starting salaries and working conditions that would encourage employee stability; most openings are for service-sector positions that have high turnover (Kasarda 1989; Petterson 1997). Moreover, Wilson (1996) argues that the weak informal employment networks in disadvantaged neighborhoods reduce the chances that neighborhood youths will gain important human capital skills, making them unattractive to employers offering better jobs, regardless of the youths' abilities or motivation to succeed. In addition, the cost of commuting keeps inner-city Blacks from working outside their neighborhoods (Kasarda 1988; Wilson 1996). Lastly, if youths living in disadvantaged neighborhoods perceive no difference in the occupational prospects of their older peers who completed high school and those who dropped out, they are likely to become discouraged and stop putting forth academic effort. In a study supporting this theoretical position, Bellair and Roscigno (2000) conclude that the absence of work and the presence of low-paying service industry job are precursors to delinquency. It is logical that the same process could lead to poorer educational performance.

Institutional Characteristics

The last of the five mechanisms through which neighborhood context can influence educational outcomes is the neighborhood's effect on institutions, particularly the local schools. School quality varies with neighborhood context. Neighborhood schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods are unable to recruit and retain quality educators (Jencks & Mayer 1990). Wacquant (1996) argues that students from disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to attend inferior schools that spend less time on teaching and learning. In support of this position, Wilson (1996) states that inner-city residents are more likely to complain about uncaring and unqualified teachers and lack of

school resources. Similarly, Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986) claim that neighborhood effects on an individual's association with delinquent peers are primarily indirect and mediated through weak attachment to school. Institutionally based mediation of neighborhood effects seems likely, but it has received relatively little theoretical or empirical consideration in the neighborhood literature.

On the other hand, Welsh, Greene, and Jenkins (1999) find unwarranted the assumption that poor communities produce bad schools, where bad schools are associated with violence and poor school performance (see Sheley, McGee, & Wright 1995; Sheley & Wright 1998). Instead, they assert that individual-level factors like student beliefs and practices have the most significant effect on school misconduct and performance. They conclude that a "school is neither blessed nor doomed entirely on the basis of where it is located" (Welsh, Greene, & Jenkins 1999, p. 108).

In summary, few studies have specifically addressed the mediating mechanisms (i.e., collective socialization, social control, social capital/social networks, limited occupational opportunity, and institutional characteristics) that link neighborhood context and educational outcomes. Several studies have pointed out the need for such research, however (Connell & Halpern-Felsher 1997; Datcher 1982; Duncan 1994; Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson 1996; Garner & Raudenbush 1991). Connell and Halpern-Felsher (1997) propose that an "enormous gap in our empirical representation of processes mediating neighborhood effects on adolescent outcomes" (p. 197). The question of how neighborhood context influences individual outcomes (e.g., educational performance) is arguably the most important unanswered question in neighborhood research. As we learn more about how neighborhood-level processes shape school performance, the literature may recapture a focus on Ogbu's original contribution, namely, the link between material conditions and individual-level achievement.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to encourage researchers who study racial difference in educational performance to look beyond the debates concerning oppositional culture theory and the burden-of-acting-white hypothesis and instead reconsider Ogbu's important insight into how structure shapes agency. Specifically, we urge systematic attention to the different material conditions that black and white students face. We contend that the relatively poor school-related behaviors demonstrated by some black students (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey 1998) do not stem from poor school-related attitudes, as is commonly claimed by proponents of the oppositional culture theory. Instead, these student behaviors reflect different structural conditions.

We examined existing findings regarding the effects of one such condition, neighborhood context. However, other interrelated structural factors (e.g., broader local labor market context or school/school district characteristics) also likely shape disparities in educational performance. Thus, we believe a multidimensional approach is needed in order to adequately explain the complex process of educational achievement. An ideal starting point is the work of William Julius Wilson. Although his social isolation/disorganization theory (1987, 1996) represents the leading view regarding the causes and consequences of concentrated poverty in U.S. cities, overspecialization in the field of educational research has tended to obscure this structural perspective. We hope that future researchers will incorporate structural factors more systematically in their studies of educational performance.

One difficulty associated with such a shift in perspective is that it presents new challenges for policymaking. Bringing about significant change in structural conditions is not easy. Since public policy cannot quickly ameliorate the problems associated with living in a disadvantaged neighborhood, understanding *how* neighborhoods affect individual level outcomes may be an important way to inform social action. We described five potential mediating mechanisms between neighborhood context and educational outcomes. Developing educational policies that target collective socialization, social control, social capital/social networks, limited occupational opportunity, and institutional characteristics may improve Blacks' academic performance relative to Whites.

On the other hand, some potential strategies that would target these mediating mechanisms could be misguided. For example, policymakers might find the idea of building social networks among parents an attractive solution —inasmuch as it does not cost money and it puts the onus on parents. But this strategy is likely to do little to resolve the educational problems of children in disadvantaged neighborhoods. When parents lack access to valuable resources and information, social networks may be less helpful and the benefits associated with enhanced social networks may not impact the education of some of the most needy students, namely, those who are poor and members of racial minorities (Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). If poor students and minorities, particularly poor blacks, are excluded from white-dominated social networks, then fostering parental links will not affect many of the social problems associated with neighborhood disadvantage.

Ultimately, targeting mediating mechanisms addresses the symptoms rather than the root causes of racial achievement disparities. In our view, the foundational causes of racial disparities in education—such as discrimination in housing (which leads to racial residential segregation), unequal funding of schools through local property taxes, racial inequality in school quality, and the lack of stable legitimate employment in urban centers—must be addressed if we are to eliminate the problems of school failure and low student achievement.

NOTES

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1. During a gathering at a national conference a few years ago, a late-career sociologist pulled the first author aside to talk about the impact of oppositional culture theory. He said that when Ogbu's ideas were first presented, they reshaped the landscape of thought related to race and educational inequality. At that time (1978), highly individualistic explanations of racial inequality (such as the culture-of-poverty thesis) held sway; Ogbu's theory brought the connection between structure and agency into the discussion. Suddenly, racial inequality in schooling had to do with broader structural conditions, such as occupational opportunities and related racial discrimination. This was a monumental contribution. Unfortunately, the educational inequality literature increasingly has ignored the structural aspects of Ogbu's ideas. This chapter aims to help refocus the discussion on broader social structures and how they shape student performance.

2. "Neighborhoods" are both conceptually slippery and difficult to operationalize. For the purpose of this conceptual discussion, neighborhoods are defined as socially constructed geographic areas with boundaries that are generally, although not necessarily universally, agreed upon. Neighborhoods may or may not have names, promote a sense of membership, form organizations, or be defined as such by residents and outsiders; but neighborhoods are seen as shaping the lived experience of residents through interactions and institutional mechanisms.

3. A theoretical distinction between social class and "material conditions" is useful here. In this discussion, "social class" refers to family level characteristics such as parental occupational prestige, education, income, and wealth. "Material conditions," on the other hand, refers to a broader set of factors both within the family and beyond. For example, family-level material conditions aptly refer to family structure, number of siblings, and the like. However, our conception of material conditions is much more expansive, and includes dimensions such as neighborhood context, school characteristics, and labor market conditions. In short, material conditions and those structural factors, largely beyond the control of the individual student, that shape their experience and constrain their opportunity.

4. Gans (1996) discusses the negative aspects of American culture's greater encouragement of high aspirations, and even expectations, among the poor relative to other societies. He argues that poor Americans who do not reduce their aspirations have a higher risk of depression and other mental illnesses.

5. We recognize that role modeling occurs within homes as well as within neighborhoods. Our emphasis on the latter is not meant to downplay the importance of parental role modeling. Rather, we are simply arguing that youths consider neighborhood role models when making evaluations about their own life prospects. Neighborhood context, therefore, affects the development of skills, attitudes, and norms over and above the effects of household influences.

6. Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003) did not find substantial differences between Blacks and Whites with respect to the effective use of social networks.