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Whitewashing our children's education: Examining segregationist school choice in the rural South

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Whitewashing our children's education: Examining

segregationist school choice in the rural south

By

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Whitewashing our children's education: Examining

segregationist school choice in the rural south

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In response to the national desegregation of schools from 1954-1976, white communities across the country formed segregationist academies to provide a privatized education to white children. In this study, I examined why parents in the rural South continue to choose these schools, as well as what this schooling environment means for the 'comprehensive racial learning' processes of its white, class-privileged student body. Drawing on 20 semi-structured interviews with parents who chose a segregationist academy in Mississippi as well as 20 interviews with children who attend this school, I found that parents justified their decision using racialized understandings of what constitutes a 'good' school. Additionally, this 'context of childhood' directly influenced the kids' perceptions of themselves as racial subjects, informing how they justified their position in the reproduction of racial inequality. This study contributes to understandings of how class privilege, rurality, and Christianity inform white identity formation and racial learning processes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From slavery to Jim Crow to contemporary patterns of racial inequality, it is clear that Mississippi has and continues to have a long and violent history of institutionalized racism. One arena in which this is especially evident is that of education, and in particular, racially segregated schooling. Although patterns of racially segregated schools and classrooms exist across the United States, Mississippi is home to an abundance of schools that were intentionally established for the sole purpose of white adults keeping white children separated from black children. Indeed, in places like Mississippi, many white communities began constructing segregationist academies during the formal call for desegregated schools after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision of 1954 (Andrews 2002, Fuquay 2002, Nevin and Bills 1976). Though many may think of push back to legal school desegregation as a long-forgotten issue of the past, these schools continue to thrive all over the United States, but particularly in the Deep South (Porter et al. 2014). Indeed, though Mississippi ranks 31st in population size (IPL2 2010), it holds the highest number of segregationist academies still in operation (Porter et al. 2014).

The central question driving this research is: What is the relationship between attending segregationist academy schools and how kids come to learn about race, racism,

and inequality? Specifically, this research will explore how white parents who choose to send their children to segregationist academies make explain the historical and contemporary racial makeup of the school and what this particular school environment means for how children who attend these schools learn and shape understandings of race, racism, and inequality. In order to gain insights into how people justify the existence of and experience these schools, I conducted interviews with 20 parents who have children currently enrolled in a segregationist academy in Mississippi and 20 children who currently attend the same academy. In addition, I also conducted a discourse analysis on the school's handbook and official website in order to explore how this school identifies itself in the present moment.

Chapter 2 of this thesis provides a brief sketch of the history of segregationist academies in Mississippi and information about their contemporary use. In Chapter 3, I present a review of the literature on the sociology of race, comprehensive racial learning, the relationships between race and schooling, and sociological research on rural schooling. Chapter 4 will describe the research methodology for this project including data generation and analysis with specific focus on recruiting and building rapport with white children. In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings of this work, including an extensive discussion of data from interviews with both parents and children. Finally, Chapter 6 will detail conclusive findings, implications of such findings, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER II

SEGREGATIONIST ACADEMIES

The United States of America is a nation rooted in racism. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), a founding figure of American sociology, pointed to the 'color line' as something that divides whites and blacks in both attitude and structure and that has been used throughout United States history to maintain white advantage. Legal scholar Dorothy Roberts (2011:11) writes, "It was only with the slave trade, Indian conquests, and a legal regime that installed a racial order that Europeans assumed whiteness as a personal identity and possession that naturally entitled them to a privileged social position." Leading race scholar Bonilla-Silva (1997: 475) argues that the United States is a "racialized social system" and racism ought to be understood as through the use of a "structural framework." Specifically, he argues that "…a society's racial structure [is] the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege" including "social, economic, political social control, and ideological mechanisms" (Bonilla-Silva 1997: 9). Under the racialized social system of the United States, schools are institutions through which a racial hierarchy and subsequent inequality is made and remade (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018, Johnson 2015, Ladson-Billings 1998, Lewis 2003). In order to understand sociologically what the impact of segregationist academies are with the respect to the reproduction of racial inequality in the U.S., an understanding of these schools and what social forces lead to their construction in the first place is necessary.

A History of Segregationist Schooling in Mississippi

After the ratification of the 13th Amendment, which formally abolished slavery, black citizens still had to fight to gain equal rights, particularly in the years following the Reconstruction Era. Though Reconstruction represented a tremendous victory in the battle for the civil rights of black Americans, "…an official regime of segregation, disenfranchisement, and terror effectively reduced them to their former status." (Roberts 2011: 12). When a rail service made blacks and whites sit in different rail cars, Homer Plessy brought his case before the Supreme Court (Kauper 1954). In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in this case, *Plessy v. Ferguson,* that the separation of whites and people of color did not violate equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment (Kauper 1954). This case set the precedent for many years to come, making it difficult to dispute what became known as Jim Crow laws in the court systems. Jim Crow laws were put in place in some southern states and legally criminalized interaction between whites and people of color (Takaki 2008, Tischauser 2012). These laws were designed to protect so-called "white purity" and went so far as to make it legally required for businesses to separate customers by race and illegal for people of different races to marry one another (Takaki 2008, Tischauser 2012).

Schools in the United States have been segregated throughout the nation's history, meaning children of color have not been allowed go to school with white children. For example, a 1973 Supreme Court ruling stated that Mexican American children in California were not guaranteed a right to the same (superior) education that their white counterparts were receiving. This formal and de jure segregation has left children of color lagging behind white children educationally due to inadequate resources (Cready and

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Fossett 1998). In the South, this has been most harmful to the black population. Both white and black public schools have been strategically controlled by the same white school board, putting all educational power into white hands (Crosby 2012). Black parents had also been responsible for creating and maintaining the schools they did have, even though "their tax dollars were funneled into the white schools, and local education boards all but refused to release education funds to black schools" (Reece and O'Connell 2015: 45).

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate schools are inherently unequal and ordered public schools across the country to desegregate (Andrews 2002, Champagne 1973, Fuquay 2002). However, this decision was met with resistance and fear by white parents across the country, particularly in the South. Whites found several different ways to fight desegregation, pushing legal and moral boundaries in their quest to keep their children in homogenous schools (Andrews 2002, Champagne 1973, Crosby 2012, Fuquay 2002, Ward 2014). When the white community realized that desegregation was inevitable, leaders started working to improve black schools, hoping to appease black parents and stifle support for desegregation in the black community (Reece and O'Connell 2015). According to Champagne (1973), the citizens of a small town in Louisiana even built a brand-new school for black children guided by this strategy. Despite these efforts, black parents were still signing petitions to desegregate all public schools (Andrews 2002). These petitions were publicized, leading to economic and physical threats for black signers (Andrews 2002). White parents believed that black families "would be content with their new school and would not cause trouble,' meaning they would not attempt integration" (Champagne 1973: 61).

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Many white parents and segregationist groups in Mississippi developed other tactics, or countermovements, to keep white children in white schools (Andrews 2002). Some towns closed their public schools entirely and Mississippi lawmakers even repealed the state's compulsory education law, allowing white parents to withdraw their children from school altogether (Andrews 2002, Munford 1973). In 1965, "freedom of choice" plans were also implemented with the intention to permit minimal desegregation of white schools (Andrews 2002). These plans allowed students to request a transfer to a different school, which resulted in the relocation of a few token black students to white schools, though there were virtually no white children transferring to black schools (Andrews 2002, Munford 1973). Historian Michael Fuquay (2002: 175) worded it best when he said, "This maintained access to education as a white prerogative, rather than a black right, a distinction of crucial importance to white leaders fearful of the shifting power relations brought on by federal legislation."

Within the first couple years of freedom of choice in Mississippi, there were fewer than three percent of black students enrolled in white schools (Crosby 2012). Besides the general anxiety a child would face when going to a new school without knowing anyone, black students in predominantly white schools had to deal with, at the very least, social isolation (Fuquay 2002). They were also faced with violence and bullying from their white peers and even some teachers (Fuquay 2002). White parents went to great lengths to make sure their children did not have social interactions with black students, creating separate dances held in private clubs (Crosby 2012). Some segregationist academies were already beginning to form, but many members of the Ku Klux Klan could not afford the tuition, making them more aggressive and apt to use

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violence to intimidate black families into staying out of "their" white schools (Fuquay 2002).

In 1968, freedom of choice was ruled unconstitutional due to its failure to eliminate "racially identifiable schools" (Munford 1973: 13). Just one year later, in *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education,* a case involving thirty Mississippi school districts, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the identified districts had until December 31, 1969 to formally desegregate their public schools (Munford 1973). Though some segregationist academies had already been established, the *Alexander* decision spurred a dramatic increase in their construction. In the year following the *Alexander* decision, there were over 60 segregationist academies opened in Mississippi, and by 1973, there were approximately 125 of them functioning within the state (Fuquay 2002). The role of the Citizen's Council, a segregationist group formed immediately following the *Brown* decision, in this explosion of segregationist academies cannot be overstated (Fuquay 2002). Considered by scholars to be the middle-class version of the KKK (Andrews 2002), the Citizen's Council used their financial, social, and political resources to construct segregationist schools all over the state, often convincing parents and community members to contribute as well (Fuquay 2002). They opened their first school in Jackson, Mississippi and had connections to nearly every academy opened during desegregation (Fuquay 2002). A community leader in Starkville, Mississippi had this to say about the segregationist school there: "…the Citizen's Council didn't found the school, but Citizen's Council people did" (Fuquay 2002: 166). The Council made a lasting impression on Mississippi schools, particularly through their founding of the

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Mississippi Private School Association, known today as the Mississippi Association of Independent Schools (Fuquay 2002).

Segregationist academies were born of hatred, violence, and white desire for social control, though this is certainly not the only reason they were harmful to black families and black children specifically. Many resources, such as books and other equipment, were illegally gifted to the private schools, the state legislator used public funds to provide a stipend for private school students, and the loss of students in the public schools resulted in a $12 million budget cut to the public schools in 1970 (Andrews 2002, Fuquay 2002). This disproportionately impacted black students who were blocked from attending these private academies (Andrews 2002, Fuquay 2002). Private schools were also given tax breaks that were later ruled unconstitutional, though they continued to receive them as the IRS looked the other way (Nevin and Bills 1976). Despite the generous and illegal funding by the state and federal governments, most segregationist academies would not have made it without the support of much of the white community (Champagne 1973, Fuquay 2002). They were often aided by local institutions such as banks and churches, and some schools even accepted tithing in place of tuition (Nevin and Bills 1976). Private schools fostered the legacy of white supremacy, hurting public education and children of color by reproducing structural inequalities and racist ideologies (Fuquay 2002). They also contributed/continue to contribute to the construction of what Omi and Winant (1994) termed 'racial projects', or linkages between structure and representation of racial categories by reorganizing resources along racial boundaries. These projects exist in virtually every dimension of social life, ultimately providing categorized meanings to people's everyday lives by aiding in the

formation of racial ideologies (Omi and Winant 1994). Contemporary racial projects exist as part of a broader historical legacy of white domination and the direct, often violent, oppression of people of color, underlining the importance of being cognizant of historical context when studying institutions (Omi and Winant 1994).

Segregationist academies were created and funded by extremely conservative leaders of the white community to keep white children out of desegregated schools (Andrews 2002, Fuquay 2002, DuPont 2014, Ward 2014). They were often provided with illegal public support that ultimately damaged the institution of public education. Public funds, namely the Mississippi voucher program for students with disabilities (discussed in detail below), are *still* used to funnel more white kids out of the public schools and into segregated schooling environments. Fuquay (2002: 180) sums it up nicely in saying "Private schools became the physical embodiment of the segregation movement and created an institutional space where white supremacist values could be passed to the new generation." The primary function of these schools is to separate children of color from their white counterparts, reproducing inequalities that have existed throughout American history. In the South, and in Mississippi especially, black children are hurt most by this cycle of exclusion from a quality education.

Contemporary Use of Segregationist Academies

Though many white flight private schools have closed, there are still several functioning today, especially in Mississippi, which has *the most* contemporary segregationist academies in the United States. This is especially notable due to the relatively low population size of Mississippi. Mississippi ranks 31st in population size (IPL2 2010), but 1st in total number of segregationist academies by state (Porter et al.

2014). To qualify as a segregationist academy, schools must meet four criteria: (1) the school must have been founded during formal desegregation, or between 1954 and 1976, (2) the school must have a contemporary enrollment of 95 percent or greater white students, (3) it must not have a *formal* religious affiliation, and (4) it must be in a county with a school district that has a 30 percent or higher minority population (Porter et al. 2014). The third criterion, or that which eliminates schools with a formal religious affiliation, is debated because most segregationist academies have ties to Christianity (e.g., Harvey 2005, Nevin and Bills 1976). Porter et al. (2014) contend that this criterion is made to rule out private Catholic schools because the white students fleeing desegregated public schools, particularly in Mississippi, sought out independent private schools, while Catholic and other church-affiliated schools did not see an unusually high increase in enrollment (Clotfelter 1976). Of course, the construction of Catholic schools and segregationist academies both resulted in predominantly white schools and therefore function as racist projects. However, because Catholic schools do not have the same historical relationship to white flight, they are often excluded from analyses of segregationist schools.

Segregationist Academies and Protestant Christianity

In their conception, most segregationist schools received support, financial and otherwise, from local churches and Christian organizations (Nevin and Bills 1976). Additionally, the community leaders who formed these schools used their religious beliefs to justify and inform their segregationist arguments (e.g., Harvey 2005, Nevin and Bills 1976). White segregationists argued that desegregation was in direct violation of God's will, and though many of them believed that every man was one in Christ, this did

not apply to a physical manifestation, only a spiritual one (Dailey 2004). This argument ultimately relied on the belief that physical kinship and spiritual kinship are divergent, just as the spiritual and secular worlds differ (Dailey 2004). For example, they often pointed to the theory of 'polygyny', or the belief that not all races descended from the same ancestors (Harvey 2005). Many believed that whites descended from Adam and non-whites did not, blaming the great biblical flood on the sexual union of whites and non-whites (Harvey 2005). Their main fear and opposition to integration stemmed from the belief that allowing blacks and whites, specifically children, to share spaces would lead to or even encourage sexual relations between races, something that was seen as the ultimate destruction of "God's plan and…handiwork" (Dailey 2004: 125). Daily (2004: 125) argues "Narratives such as these had two key pedagogical aims: to make the case for segregation as divine law, and to warn that transgression of this law would inevitably be followed by divine punishment." Though contemporary arguments surrounding race relations are typically not this volatile, recent scholarship has demonstrated a continuing relationship between Protestant Christianity and a refusal to acknowledge the harms of racism.

In their work on the intersection of race, religion, and racial attitudes, Emerson and Smith (2001: 74) found that many white evangelical Christians blame issues of racism on prejudiced individuals, the perceived tendency of minority groups to exaggerate matters of race and racism, and "…a fabrication of the self-interested- again often African Americans, but also the media, the government, or liberals." Evangelicals are defined as those who "…believe that Christ died for the salvation of all, and that anyone who accepts Christ as the one way to eternal life will be saved" (Emerson and

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Smith 2001: 3). Their perspectives on race relations stem from what Emerson and Smith (2001) refer to as the White Evangelical Tool Kit, which consists of beliefs in 'accountable freewill individualism,' 'relationalism,' and 'antistructuralism.' Accountable freewill individualism is the idea that individuals exist independent of structures and are therefore accountable for their own actions while relationalism emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships in solving social problems (Emerson and Smith 2001). Finally, antistructuralism posits that structural solutions to social problems are irrelevant and unrealistic (Emerson and Smith 2001). Considering that many segregationist academies were formed by religious segregationists, as well as the tendency of white evangelical Christians to talk about contemporary race relations in a way that frames racism and inequality as an ahistorical, individual-level problem (Emerson and Smith 2001), it is unsurprising that so many of these academies continue to practice Protestant Christianity even without an official religious affiliation.

Prevalence of Segregation

Though many in the contemporary United States consider institutional racism a problem of the past, racial segregation is still extremely high (Bonilla-Silva 2018) and black and Latino populations are disproportionately subject to double segregation by both race and poverty (Orfield et al. 2012). Such spatial segregation results in the social segregation of whites and people of color (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006), making it difficult for people of color, particularly black Americans, to find affordable, decent housing and to build wealth (Bonilla-Silva 2018, Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Additionally, while school segregation can be found in Mississippi, it is certainly still a national problem that is only getting worse. Schools were more segregated in the 2000-2001 school year than in the

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1970's (Bonilla-Silva 2018) and the proportion of schools across the country that consist of almost all-minority student populations has tripled from the height of integration in 1983 to 2013 (The Economist 2017). As we have learned from our nation's history, separate institutions are inherently unequal. Research has consistently shown that racially isolated schools, particularly those in poor neighborhoods, are much less likely to offer college preparatory classes, typically have high teacher turnover, and have significantly higher dropout rates (Orfield et al. 2012). Further, data show that the concentration of poverty *in schools* has more of an impact on educational attainment than the poverty status of an individual student (Orfield et al. 2012).

Though the focus of this project is on the role that private academies play in the reproduction of inequality vis-à-vis how white kids learn about race and racism, the Mississippi public school system is cause for similar concern as well. For example, the Cleveland, Mississippi public school district made national news in 2016 after it was ordered by the federal government to desegregate, 63 years after the *Brown vs. Board* decision (McLaughlin 2017). Additionally, Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the country (FCNL 2017, Nave 2017). As such, inadequate funding for public education is a major social problem. Mississippi is home to several parent-led organizations, such as Parents for Public Schools and Parents Campaign, that fight for equitable funding for public schools and participate in ongoing debates about charter schools (EdChoice 2018). Additionally, these organizations have recently been concerned with the state's voucher program which offers private school tuition aid to students with disabilities, though there is no test required to prove disability status (EdChoice 2018). This voucher program is controversial as many believe it takes much-needed funding from public schools and does

not hold the private schools accountable to the state (see: Kinchen 2018, NCSL 2013). Mississippi legislators have recently moved to extend the program to students without disabilities (Harris 2018), opening the potential to push more white children out of public schools. While these debates in educational policy span the nation, the consequences of these policy decisions on the lives of children are tremendous as the state of Mississippi faces some of the worst child outcomes across a number of measures, including education. For example, the 2015 national dropout rate hovered around 5-6% while the dropout rate for black teens was 6.5% (NCES 2017). In the same year, the composite dropout rate for Mississippi was around 11.8% (KidsCount 2017). Though data on the dropout rate by race is limited, we know that the composite dropout rate for Mississippi teens in 2012 was around 12% and the rate for black teens was nearly 18% that same year (KidsCount 2013). Further, though around 34% of the adult population in the United States has completed four or more years of higher education (Statista 2018), only 21% of Mississippi adults will hold a college degree (KidsCount 2018). Segregation is a problem in most institutions outside of education and in countless places outside of Mississippi. Many believe that we have reached a post-racial era, or one in which race is no longer salient in the life chances of individuals (e.g., Bobo et al. 1997, Bonilla-Silva 2018, Quillian 2006). However, racial segregation is an issue that is still plaguing every foundation of our nation and it cannot be overcome if it is ignored.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Sociology of Race and Racism

Scientists have spent centuries attempting to prove the 'biological' nature of race and the origins of racial categories (e.g., Haney-López 2006, Montagu 1962, Smedley and Smedley 2005, Roberts 2011). However, most of the studies claiming to have found such proof were carried out uncritically (e.g., Du Bois 1898) and had a host of major methodological issues, namely unreliable measurements and sampling techniques (e.g., Smedley and Smedley 2005, Roberts 2011). More recent scholarship has determined that race is a socially constructed category that "…signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (Omi and Winant 2015: 110). Social scientists have also documented and analyzed racialization, or the process through which groups of people come to be classified as races (Cornell and Hartmann 1998) as well as how the subsequent racial categories take on meaning (Omi and Winant 2015). Under the theoretical framework of racial formation, or the "…sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi and Winant 2015: 109), we know that racialization is not a linear process. This means that racial categories and the meanings associated with them are not fixed and tend to vary across time and place (see also: Almaguer 1994, Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2018, Haney-López 2006, Lewis 2003, Jung and Almaguer 2000).

Racial formation and racialization processes, both with origins situated in colonialism, cannot be separated from power and material interests (e.g., Blumer 1958, Lewis 2004, Omi and Winant 2015). In fact, the state and the laws it imposes have created and maintained racialized groups (Jung and Almaguer 2000), both through coercion (interfering with marriage and reproduction, establishing material inequalities between groups, etc.) and ideology (transforming racial categories into material forms, helping categories transcend their historical contexts, etc.) (Haney-López 2006). Lewis (2004) argues that whiteness has historically been defined indirectly through the construction of the 'other' while also dominating the 'other' (see also: Said 1978). The salience of 'race' and racial categories took hold in the U.S. with the colonization of Native American tribes as the horrific treatment of these peoples was justified by racializing them as 'savage' and 'uncivilized' (Almaguer 1994, Smedley and Smedley 2005). Anglo colonizers defined themselves in opposition to these ideals, soon associating 'civility' and enlightenment with European ideals (Almaguer 1994). Roberts (2011) argues that white identity was constructed during the slave trade and that though slavery has been present throughout world history, African slaves were the first to be constructed as actual *property* (see also: Harris 1993). White identity was quickly connected to citizenship (Almaguer 1994, Haney-López 2006, Jung and Almaguer 2000), affording rights and privileges to those deemed white that helped ease class-based tensions among white settlers (Roberts 2011).

Though the United States has abolished slavery (Takaki 2008), Omi and Winant (1994: 65) note the importance of the recognition of the U.S. as a "racial dictatorship". This includes the acknowledgement that though race is socially constructed, it is salient

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in every aspect of life (Du Bois 1903) as the U.S. has moved from, "dictatorship to democracy, from domination to hegemony" (Omi and Winant 1994: 67). Such racial hegemony works to continuously restructure and reproduce pertinent racial categories through social life, but particularly through policy (Omi and Winant 1994). Winant (2000) further argues for a new theoretical framing of race that recognizes: (1) racial categories and meanings are apt to change and are informed by sociopolitical context, (2) such categories are formed and maintained by the intersection of institutions and experiences, and (3) the challenges these categories and meanings have faced are largely due to the agency exhibited by organizations and individuals in the post-World War II era of activism.

This project was informed by a sociological view of race as socially constructed yet salient in the day-to-day interactions and institutional settings (historical and contemporary) which guide the lives of whites and people of color. Further, race is a social reality maintained and shaped by racialized social systems (Bonilla-Silva 2018). The racial structure in the United States is, "the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege" (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Indeed, the construction of race and racial categories is ultimately a *political* process used by those who are classified as white to justify the oppression of people of color (Roberts 2011). Lewis (2004: 625) argues that, "…the formation and evolution of white as a racial category is inherently about struggles over resources" and that whiteness is ultimately tied to power, meaning most whites do not have to recognize race as a meaningful part of their identity to accrue the benefits of it. However, ideologies that defend the racial status quo will not go smoothly for all whites (Lewis 2004), which has been analyzed and demonstrated in

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previous work on marginalized whiteness (see: Hartigan 2013, Hubbs 2014, Jarosz and Lawson 2002, McDermott 2006, Rushing 2017, Wray 2006). Thus, this study explored how white families understand their place in a racialized social system and how they draw on/reform/reject dominant racial ideologies to justify this placement.

Because the racial order is institutionalized, it is necessarily hidden, especially from most whites (Bonilla-Silva 2018, Lewis 2004). Racism in the United States is ideological as well as systemic and institutionalized (Bonilla-Silva 2018, Omi and Winant 1994). Omi and Winant's work (1994) focuses primarily on the synthesis of the political/economic structure with culture that works to reproduce racial inequality, while Bonilla-Silva (2018) shows how such dominant racial ideologies are made, remade, and defended within a racialized social structure. Though individuals are necessarily embedded in social structures, they are not determined by them, making it imperative to recognize the structural elements that inform attitudes about race and racism as well as how such attitudes are achieved and negotiated in every day interaction (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018).

Colorblind Racial Ideology

Bonilla-Silva (2018: 2) argues that the dominant racial ideology in the United States has shifted from 'Jim Crow' era styles of explicit racism to what he terms 'colorblind racial ideology,' which "…explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics." The four central frames of colorblind ideology outlined in his work include 'abstract liberalism,' 'naturalization,' 'cultural racism,' and 'minimization of racism' (Bonilla-Silva 2018). While the use of 'abstract liberalism' typically includes using ideas associated with political and economic liberalism (i.e.,

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equal opportunity and individualism) to explain racial inequality, 'naturalization' is used to explain away inequality by positing it as natural (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Similarly, 'cultural racism' is used to blame inequality on the supposed 'culture' of marginalized groups and 'minimization of racism' is used to assert that racial discrimination is no longer salient to the life chances of people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2018). As Bonilla-Silva (2018: 219) writes, "…a dominant ideology is effective not by establishing ideological uniformity, but by providing the frames to organize difference."

In addition to the frames used when employing colorblind racial ideology, Bonilla-Silva (2018: 77) points to the different 'styles,' or the "…linguistic manners and rhetorical strategies" used to express colorblind ideology, as well as the testimonies and stories used by whites to 'repair' their own incoherent and contradictory ideas about race and racism (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Speaking to Bonilla-Silva's (2018) assertion that colorblind racial ideology is pliable and therefore creatively manipulated by whites to defend the 'racial status quo,' Mueller (2017) argues that whites participate in the maintenance of 'epistemologies of ignorance' in order to deny white privilege and 'rescue white virtue.' This creative maneuvering of colorblind ideology allows whites to "…process racial logic under conditions that make ignorance difficult" (Mueller 2017: 220). This study was informed by a recognition that the construction of racial groups and the subsequent racial hierarchy is ultimately a matter of political interests and that such interests are often defended by whites in ways that are calculated and rarely explicit or straightforward. For this reason, it is imperative to understand how white children come to learn about race and racial meanings.

White Racial Socialization vs. Comprehensive Racial Learning

Racial socialization refers to the processes in which information and meanings regarding race and ethnicity are transmitted from adults to children, in the context of families (Hughes et al. 2006). This process has been studied extensively among black, Latinx, and Asian American communities and families (e.g., Hughes et al. 2006, Lacy 2004, Tuan 2005), but the process of white racial socialization, whereby white children learn and/or form understandings of race (Hagerman 2016), has been largely understudied (for important exceptions, see Hagerman 2010, 2014, 2016, Lewis 2003, Perry 2002, Underhill 2017). Scholars have argued that due to their membership in the dominant group, white parents often do not find it pertinent to explicitly discuss race or racism with their children (Fine et al. 1997, Frankenberg 1993, Hamm 2001). However, Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) find that dominant racial ideologies, defined by Bonilla-Silva (2018: 9) as "…the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify or challenge the racial status quo…", played a significant role in the socialization process for both white children and children of color. For example, research shows that many white parents reinforce colorblind ideology when discussing contemporary issues with their children (Hagerman 2010, 2016), even those that are highly racialized, such as the riots in Ferguson, Missouri after the police shooting of Michael Brown (Underhill 2017).

Hagerman (2014) argues that the racial logic employed by children is largely informed by the ways in which their parents approach discussing topics such as race and inequality. She also notes that children are not merely socialized to believe their parents' ideals but actively work with and against such ideals, carving out their own role in the

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process of ideological reproduction (Hagerman 2014, 2016, 2018). However, Hagerman (2018) argues that the more salient role of white parents occurs through the ways in which they influence their child's 'racial context of childhood', or the very way that parents structure the lives of their children through the choosing of neighborhoods, schools, etc. The racial context of childhood both influences who children spend time with and sends implicit messages about what kinds of kids are 'good' vs. 'bad' (Hagerman 2018).

Of course, the institution of family is not the only mechanism through which children learn about race. For that reason, this study was informed by Erin Winkler's (2012: 7) theory of 'comprehensive racial learning' as the process "…through which children negotiate, interpret, and make meaning of the various and conflicting messages they receive about race…" which specifically emphasizes the importance of place in the formation of racial identities. In examining how such racial learning plays out in urban and suburban schools, scholars have found that whiteness is maintained and reproduced through "collective approval and reinforcement", or the silent acceptance of whiteness by the majority as the norm (Perry 2002: 43). Lewis (2003) also finds that lack of explicit discussions about race in the classroom reinforces colorblind discourse, as it supports the idea that any acknowledgement of race is inherently 'racist'. Of course, Hagerman's (2018) and Winkler's (2012) work demonstrate that conversations/interactions about race (or lack thereof) are not the only mechanism through which racial learning can take place. Hagerman's (2018) theory of the importance of one's 'racial context of childhood' demonstrates the need to understand the ways in which school choice decisions are made

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as well as what these choices mean for the comprehensive racial learning processes of the children who attend them.

White Parents and Schooling

Contemporary rural segregationist school choice has been largely understudied, but research in urban areas has consistently shown that white parents are more likely to avoid schools with high minority enrollment (Dougherty et al. 2009, Holmes 2002, Johnson 2015, Saporito and Lareau 1999), especially in areas with a larger black population (Saporito 2009). In fact, Saporito and Lareau (1999) refer to the first-order decision in school choice as the immediate elimination of certain schools from consideration based on the racial composition of the school. Despite popular claims that all parents 'self-segregate' when choosing schools, Saporito and Lareau (1999) found that black parents are far more likely to choose diverse environments for their children, in hopes of offering them a more well-rounded education. Additionally, the selection of neighborhoods is intimately tied to school choice as whites tend to associate neighborhood quality with racial composition, often perceiving neighborhoods with high percentages of minority populations as less safe, less likely to appreciate in value, and more likely to have 'bad' schools (Krysan et al. 2008). These understandings are absolutely reflected in the social and spatial segregation of the black community (e.g., Massey and Denton 1993).

In reality, when it comes to causes of persistent school segregation, research findings point to the behaviors of white parents. White parents tend to associate whiter schools with safety, better academics, and better social opportunities for children (Hagerman 2018, Holmes 2002, Johnson 2015, Saporito and Lareau 1999). Perhaps the

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most important of these characteristics is the opportunity for social interaction for their children among other white, wealthy peers (Holmes 2002, Johnson 2015), often linked to the avoidance of children and families of color who have been historically disenfranchised (Saporito 2009). As Johnson (2015: 41) writes, "While claiming to be concerned with such things as safety and class size, the families we spoke with were ultimately seeking whiter- and, in their view, inextricably wealthier- school districts for their children, regardless of any other of the school's characteristics." Additionally, most parents rely on second-hand information about academics and safety provided by their social networks rather than researching test scores or visiting potential schools (Dougherty et al. 2009, Holmes 2002). Holmes (2002) argues that parents not only pass on information about school reputations, but also construct such reputations through social networks and that parents with adequate resources will almost always choose schools that serve a high-status population. Of course, white parents tend to rationalize these choices by employing what Hagerman (2018: 74) terms 'justified avoidance', or the "…strategies of vehemently claiming not to be racist while simultaneously acting in ways that secure advantages for their own child."

This is certainly an example of the ways in which race *and* class intersect to create unique experiences and opportunities for white, class privileged families. However, this use of financial and social resources does not stop at school choice. Lewis and Diamond (2015) argue that when white middle-class parents choose diverse public schools, they often participate in what Tilly (1999) refers to as opportunity hoarding. Lewis and Diamond (2015: 155) define opportunity hoarding as the "…process through which dominant groups who have control over some good (e.g., education) regulate its

circulation, thus preventing out-groups from having full access to it." This ultimately means that white parents, particularly those with class privilege, tend to maintain and reproduce racialized systems of inequality within schools, such as tracking, that gives their children an advantage over working class children and children of color (Lewis and Diamond 2015, see also: Oakes 2005, Posey-Maddox 2014). Of course, this does not just take place when white parents engage with their children's schooling, as Lipsitz (2006) argues a 'possessive investment in whiteness' informs institutional and personal decisions made by whites. For example, both Lewis and Diamond (2015) and Lipsitz (2006) point to the resistance by whites to desegregation orders to demonstrate this 'investment' in keeping educational opportunities within the white community.

The intersection of race and class plays a role in this, as middle-class parents tend to engage in a form of childrearing called concerted cultivation, or one which has an emphasis on children's experiences, individuality, and often an overwhelming schedule of activities (Lareau 2002). Though Lareau (2002) found this pattern to be true among white *and* black middle-class participants, white children are more likely to be 'cultivated' in this way than their black peers due to the racial disparities in private wealth (e.g., Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Whether maintaining segregation within schools or between them, white middle and upper-class parents use their resources to acquire advantages for their children regardless of merit (see: Hagerman 2018, Johnson 2015, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Oakes 2005). Intentionally or otherwise, this often reproduces structural inequality and strips educational opportunities from children of color by creating an overabundance of resources and opportunities that are accessible only to white children (Lewis and Diamond 2015, Oakes 2005, Posey-Maddox 2014). This

works under the normalization of such practices as simply doing what is best for one's child (Hagerman 2018). Further, though some parents do recognize their role in the reproduction of inequality, they simply refuse to 'compromise' with their child's education (Hagerman 2018, Johnson 2015). Segregationist school choice is certainly an issue, but the problem with white parental control does not stop there. Research consistently shows that white, class-privileged parents use their privileges to gain favor and advantages for their children. Given this, we must ask: How do kids themselves explain such unequal access to educational resources?

Kids, Schooling, and the Hidden Curriculum of Privilege

Curriculum scholars have identified a distinction between the formal curriculum used in schools to teach such subjects as reading, writing, and arithmetic and the hidden curriculum, which sends morally-laden messages to students about race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. (Portelli 1993). In 1979, scholar Michael Apple was one of the first to study extensively the seemingly-neutral 'official' language of schools and found that it is often used by teachers, school administrators, and parents to maintain and reproduce class- and race-based inequalities without stating explicitly that they are doing so (Dimitriadis, Weis, and McCarthy 2006). Similarly, Delpit (1988: 25) argues that "…success in institutions…is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power" and that some styles of communication and learning (particularly those that align with white and middle-upper class values) are more valued in the institution of education. However, these styles of communication, though the key to success, are not explicitly taught by schools to children of color and/or working-class children (Delpit 1988). Though middle-upper class children and/or white children are not typically

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explicitly taught these styles of communication and learning either, they often learn to use them as commodities in the classroom, just as their parents do (e.g., Bettie 2013, Calarco 2011, Delpit 1988, Lewis and Diamond 2015).

Calarco (2011) found that middle-class children are more likely to ask for and receive help in classroom settings, often at the direct detriment to the self-esteem and education of their working-class peers. She argues that they are not only drawing on or forming understandings of class privilege but are then also engaging in those behaviors to secure advantages for themselves (Calarco 2011). Similarly, Lewis and Diamond (2015) found that the racial differences in educational outcomes in the school they studied were not due to differences in caring or trying on the part of students. In contrast, the black students they surveyed reported studying more, spending more time on homework assignments, and paying more attention in class than their white peers (Lewis and Diamond 2015). Despite this, they still hold less academic achievement than white students and Lewis and Diamond (2015) argue that this can be attributed to the ways in which understandings of race inform how children are disciplined (see also: Ferguson 2003, Lewis 2003) as well as how resources are distributed among students. Students therefore come to understand whiteness as a currency that can be 'cashed in' for unearned advantages (Lewis and Diamond 2015). Though schools are considered by many to be the great equalizer, research has consistently shown that they are ultimately organized in ways that reproduce inequalities along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. (see: Anyon 2006, Bettie 2013, Bowles and Gintis 2011, Calarco 2011, Carr and Kefalas 2009, Delpit 1988, Kozol 2012, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Oakes 2005, Orenstein 2000). So,

how do children understand and interpret such stark differences in educational opportunities and outcomes?

Though educational differences based on race and class are not typically discussed among teachers or school personnel, kids certainly come to recognize them and form assumptions about how such inequalities come to exist. White middle-upper class children often come to view their black and Latinx peers as lazy or as products of 'bad' homes and families (Bettie 2013, Demerath 2009, Lewis 2003, Perry 2002). Lewis (2001: 799) writes, "The power of ideologies lies in their ability to facilitate collective domination in a way such that they often make vast inequalities understandable and acceptable to those both at the top and the bottom of the social order." This sentiment holds true as many scholars have found that working-class children and/or children of color do not always recognize the ways in which they are being systematically disadvantaged, leading them to blame themselves and to view themselves and other kids 'like them' as inherently 'bad' (Bettie 2013, Demerath 2009, Lewis 2003, Oakes 2005). Even when these children recognize their place in a system that is stacked against them, they still receive messages indicating that they are simply not welcome in some spaces, making them less likely to attempt to secure academic resources privileged children actively seek out, such as a seat in an advanced placement course (Lewis and Diamond 2015). They are also sometimes resentful of their high-achieving, privileged peers rather than the institution of education itself (Bettie 2013, Demerath 2009). Despite this, though, Lewis and Diamond (2015: 43) find that "…black parents and students develop a much more complex understanding of the relationship between education and

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opportunity…seeing education as a tool for challenging discrimination rather than a reason to disinvest from it."

Though little research has been conducted on the ways in which school context informs how students understand privilege and inequality, Hagerman (2018) found that the white children in her study who attend private school view public school kids as loud, apathetic, and even dangerous. In contrast, they feel entitled to the best kind of education available, perceiving their schools to be safer and more academically challenging than public schools (Hagerman 2018). These sentiments map onto their ideas about race and class as they are very aware that kids 'like them' in private school are not the same as kids who go to public schools (Hagerman 2018). For example, Hagerman (2018: 94) finds that many private school kids "…interpret their status to mean that they are unique, special, deserving, extraordinarily talented, more hardworking, more sensitive to the problems of the world, more in need of protection from gangs and drugs and loud black kids, more knowledgeable about real-life skills or current events…" In this way, even though they do not experience the daily interactions with working-class children and children of color that privileged kids in public schools do, private school kids are still forming morally-laden understandings about themselves, their place in the world, and 'others' (Hagerman 2018). Through these structural mechanisms, all students learn that whiteness is a resource and is itself a form of property that provides citizenship rights that are unavailable to people of color (e.g., Ladson-Billings 1998, Lewis 2003). This study will build upon the work of Hagerman (2018), seeking to understand how children who attend segregationist academies understand their place in a school that was formed

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specifically to reproduce advantages for white, class-privileged children and deny them to working-class children and children of color.

Rural Schooling

Research on rural schooling typically focuses on the aspirations and achievements of students and the effect this has on communities that are already suffering economically (Byun et al. 2012, Carr and Kefalas 2009, Irvin et al. 2011, Meece et al. 2013, Sherman and Sage 2011). Students of different class backgrounds receive different levels of attention and encouragement, often pushing students from class-privileged families into colleges and out of the community that has little to offer them in the way of opportunities (Carr and Kefalas 2009, Sherman and Sage 2011). Rural students also tend to have higher educational aspirations, regardless of class background, if their parents hold the expectation that they will attend college (Byun et al. 2012). However, the racial makeup of schools informs the overall educational attainment for students, as students who attend low income schools or schools with high minority populations tend to have lower academic achievement and aspirations than students in affluent white schools (Byun et al. 2012, Irvin et al. 2011).

Similar to suburban schooling (Chambliss 1973), students in rural schools who show talent and/or who come from prominent middle-class families are often groomed to leave the communities they grew up in to achieve secondary education and find better jobs (Carr and Kefalas 2009, Sherman and Sage 2011). This is problematic in that rural communities tend to pool resources around children and young adults who will later leave, while ignoring the students who will soon be contributing to the local economy (Carr and Kefalas 2009, Meece et al. 2013, Sherman and Sage 2011). Certainly, some of

the students who receive a college education will return to their communities, but these students tend to be graduates of community colleges who then take vocational jobs (Carr and Kefalas 2009). Research on rural education consistently shows that students from middle-class families and/or who attend affluent schools are the most likely to succeed and leave, while students who are associated with low-income schools and families tend to get left behind without the help of extra resources (i.e., attention from teachers and community support) given to the aforementioned group (Carr and Kefalas 2009, Byun et al. 2012, Irvin et al. 2011, Meece et al. 2013, Sherman and Sage 2011). The focus in these studies is primarily on class differences because they were conducted in predominantly white settings. Notably, there are many rural communities that are not predominantly white and rural areas in general are becoming more racially diverse (Lichter 2012). Further, even in racially homogenous rural communities, race matters for how people think of themselves and others (e.g., Leap 2017). The racial context in Mississippi is very different and in some ways unique, which could potentially lead to different findings about how rurality, class background, and race play into school choice and environment.

Summary of the Relevant Literature

A review of the literature shows that white parents in all areas of the country tend to choose white school environments for their children (Dougherty et al. 2009, Holmes 2002, Saporito and Lareau 1999). Further, once a school choice has been made, white parents often continue to manipulate the distribution of advantages and resources to provide unfair advantages to their children (Lewis and Diamond 2015, see also: Oakes 2005). However, these parents tend to downplay their role in the reproduction of

inequality by embracing universalism and individualism (e.g., DiAngelo 2011, Johnson 2015). Universalism is the belief that the lived experiences of whites is shared by everyone, while individualism posits that individuals have equal life chances and are therefore responsible for their choices (DiAngelo 2011, Johnson 2015), through a colorblind frame (Bonilla-Silva 2018) as well as opportunity hoarding (Lewis and Diamond 2015). Previous scholarship shows that school context, as well as the ways in which inequalities are reproduced within and between schools, matter for how kids think of themselves and others (see: Bettie 2013, Demerath 2009, Johnson 2015, Lewis 2003, Oakes 2005). Segregationist academies in Mississippi offer a unique insight to the production of racial ideologies by whites, including parents as well as children, due to their racial complexity, both in the history of their formation and in their contemporary use.

This study examined the contemporary use of segregationist academies in the rural South by white parents, how these parents conceptualize the history and contemporary racial makeup of the school they chose, and how comprehensive racial learning processes for children are influenced by these choices and the environment they entail. This will add to the literature on race, education, and racial learning processes by examining how parents explain their segregated school choice in a contemporary colorblind context and what this means for the racial identity formation and racial learning processes of white children. It will also situate these understandings in a specific racial context which has a particularly oppressive history and continues, in many ways, to fight against progress. This study maps onto an ongoing conversation surrounding education legislation concerned with school choice and funding issues in Mississippi and

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in the U.S. more broadly. Finally, it adds to the literature on institutional segregation in rural settings as well as the understudied topic of comprehensive racial learning processes for white children, or how the next generation of white children in a rural context come to understand race/racism and their role in the reproduction of racial inequality. This is particularly significant due to the current increase in racially diverse populations in rural areas (e.g., Lichter 2012). Policy makers must consider the long history of racial hierarchy and domination/oppression, as well as how this history continues to inform educational inequality, when making decisions about school reform or they will ultimately continue to reproduce such inequality.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

The primary aim of sociological inquiry is to describe and examine the social world and how it works. However, qualitative and quantitative researchers typically approach this puzzle with inherently different questions (Becker 2001). While quantitative work gets at the existence of relationships and finding support for them, qualitative investigation is driven by the commitment to "…show how things hang together in a web of mutual influence or support or interdependence…" (Becker 2001: 319), reflecting the 'why' and 'how' of human social exchange (Agee 2009). Qualitative work is concerned with understanding how people discuss their world and construct meanings about their everyday lives. This study of how social meaning making processes work is further couched in rich social context that is largely unattainable in much quantitative work (Becker 2001). Qualitative research is also inductive and iterative, characterized by the alternating involvement of the researcher between theory and data generation/analysis. Though the objective of much quantitative work is to address specific questions with generalizable answers, qualitative analysis is concerned with understanding how individuals in specific, situated cases explain their social worlds and the phenomena that shaped/are shaped by such perspectives (Becker 2001). Given the questions that this research study asks, I drew upon qualitative methods in my research.

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This study explored the relationship between attending a segregationist academy and the outcomes for comprehensive racial learning processes. Specifically, I examined how 20 parents who chose a particular segregationist academy in rural Mississippi justify their choice, as well as what this 'racial context of childhood' (e.g., Hagerman 2018) means for 20 children currently attending the school. Qualitative methodology is most appropriate for this study as it captures the historical and contemporary racial and political contexts that frame these experiences and understandings. In addition, this study draws upon qualitative methods that include children's perspectives, including child-centered interviews. By doing so, this research considers children's claims about segregationist academies, race, inequality, etc. as told by them (e.g., Barker and Weller 2003).

Epistemological Approach

The epistemological approach to this study was informed and framed by feminist approaches to social science research. Specifically, I embraced Donna Haraway's (1988) appeal to the recognition of situated knowledges, or the rejection of a transcendence over the research subjects and process itself as well as the acceptance of how my positionality informed the data generation, analysis, and writing involved in this project. Haraway (1988: 95) writes, "situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource…". In her work on the racialized and class-specific experiences of adolescent girls in rural California, Bettie (2013) writes about the difficulty of acknowledging the power researchers have in the interpretation of data, especially when such data is generated with marginalized

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populations. Though the children who participated in this study are certainly privileged in many ways, it is still essential that this research represents as accurately as possible their voices and agency. This required special attention to the ways in which my status as a researcher creates a power imbalance between myself and my participants. Thus, I embarked on this research with an awareness that interview data is generated between participant and researcher given the conditions of the interview and positionality of everyone involved, not something that exists independent of the interview process that the researcher can go out and 'collect' (Holstein and Gubrium 2011).

Case Selection

To understand how families justify their segregationist school choice and how this is informed by other factors, I conducted a qualitative case study of one segregationist academy in Mississippi. Gerring (2004: 342) defines a case study as "…an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units" in which a 'unit' "…connotes a spatially bound phenomenon" such as a community, school, or family. Methodologically, this study consisted of interviews with students and parents of students as well as a qualitative discourse analysis of the school's website and handbook. The use of case studies is common in research on education and white racial socialization (see: Carr and Kefalas 2011, Hagerman 2010, 2016, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Posey-Maddox 2014). For example, Carr and Kefalas (2011) used a case study to examine the relationships between rural educators, parents, and students in a small Iowa town. With the rich information they generated, they were able to decipher which types of students were more likely to leave, stay in, or come back to the community. Similarly,

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Posey-Maddox (2014) relied on ethnographic data to piece together how white parents with children in low-income schools work the system (often through school personnel) to gain advantages for their children, reproducing racial and class inequality. Lastly, Hagerman's (2016) ethnographic case study of an affluent white community allowed her to navigate the arduous innerworkings of the racial ideological production and reproduction of white children through play and conversation. She argues that the children in this community did not blindly reproduce racial ideology as it was framed to them by adults but often 'reworked' these frames in a process demonstrating immense agency (Hagerman 2016). These examples of qualitative case work demonstrate the importance of context and rich detail when studying the intersections of race, schools, families, and power in the lives of children.

Making use of Flyvbjerg's (2006) suggestions for the selection of cases, the segregationist academy in this study was chosen for its status as an extreme and critical case. A segregationist academy, which will necessarily consist of a student body that is at least 95% white (Porter et al. 2014), is the most extreme example of segregationist school choice in the United States and, as such, one of the most explicit examples of an intentionally segregated 'racial context of childhood' (e.g., Hagerman 2018). Certainly, research shows that white parents tend to choose schools with high white populations and avoid schools with high minority populations (Dougherty et al. 2009, Holmes 2002, Saporito and Lareau 1999), but segregationist academies are almost entirely white and are private, often meaning expensive tuition rates. Further, segregationist academies constitute an extreme case as the state of Mississippi had the most violent reaction in

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opposition to school desegregation (see: Andrews 2002, DuPont 2014, Fuquay 2002, Ward 2014). A segregationist academy would also be considered a critical case because if children who go to a school which was formed with the explicit intent to provide segregationist education learn to reinforce, reproduce, and rework colorblind ideology and discourse, it can be assumed that white children in most any type of school environment will have similar understandings.

Location: Mississippi

This research was conducted in Mississippi for theoretical purposes. Porter et al. (2014) note that during the 1993-1994 school year, the South held 83 percent of segregationist academies and 87 percent of segregationist academy enrollment. Mississippi held 42 of these schools out of 200 in the South and 240 in the country, making it the state with the greatest number of contemporary segregationist academies in the United States (Porter et al. 2014). This is not surprising, as Reece and O'Connell (2015) note that white private school enrollment is likely to be higher in areas where the black population is or once was "…linked to white prosperity", and/or areas where slavery was more prevalent. Additionally, one of the most salient factors behind the white flight into private, segregationist schooling is the proportion of blacks in the county or public school (Andrews 2002, Cready and Fossett 1998, Munford 1973). This relationship is important not only in helping us understand what kinds of things make segregationist schools more likely to be sustained, but also because it demonstrates that the legacy of slavery is still instrumental in shaping the way education is structured in the rural South (Reece and O'Connell 2015).

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Finally, race matters within schools and between them, no matter what the population looks like. Rushing (2017: 294) notes that the South is often labeled a "problem-ridden place", othering it and drawing attention away from subtler racism existing in all areas of the United States. To allow this is to allow for structural inequalities to stay hidden and remain unaddressed in other areas of the country. It should also be noted that segregationist academies are not only found in the South and there are still functional segregationist schools in all regions (Porter et al. 2014). Further, segregationist school choice does not begin and end with schools that fall under the historical categorization as segregationist academies, as research shows that white parents consistently choose schools with white populations (Saporito and Lareau 1999, see also: Dougherty et al. 2009, Holmes 2002). Mississippi offers a particularly rich insight into the ways in which racist segregationist history continues to shape how inequalities are reproduced and reframed under the umbrella of a contemporary racial climate that hides and denies the salience of race in institutional inequality, as well as the everyday lives and struggles of people of color, particularly black Americans. However, though Mississippi's historical and contemporary relationship with race and inequality is important, but it should not be an excuse to ignore racial injustice throughout the United States.

Case: Colvin Academy

Colvin Academy (pseudonym) is located in a small Mississippi town that has a median household income of roughly $30,000 (according to the 2010 census).

Considering that attending Colvin Academy costs more than $5,000 per child each academic year, it is clear that CA students come from families with class privilege, especially given the local economic context. The racial makeup of the town is approximately 60% white and over 30% African American (NCES1 2016). During the 2015-2016 academic year, Colvin Academy had a student body population (K-12) that was roughly 98% white and 2% African American (NCES2 2016). The administration and teaching staff at Colvin Academy are all white, with a few adults of color working in the cafeteria or as janitorial staff. For every teacher, there are less than 15 students (SchoolDigger 2018). It is classified as a Christian school though it has no specific affiliation or denomination. In contrast, the public high school located in the same county district had a student body that was roughly 70% African American and 30% white and has about 17 students for every teacher (SchoolDigger 2018) in addition to an administrative and teaching staff that is racially diverse. Colvin Academy was chosen in part because of my own accessibility to this school. It was also selected because of its location in a small town with few schooling options compared to other areas in Mississippi. Colvin Academy stands to offer rich data due to its unique historical background and contemporary context.

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Colvin Academy and Rurality

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Colvin Academy is located in a county classified as a micropolitan area by the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) based on population size (HRSA 2017). However, OMB designations are arbitrary, and scholars have yet to reach a consensus on the best way to define rurality (e.g., Bell 1994, Bell 2007, Halfacree 2005,

Murdoch and Pratt 1997). Material conditions associated with rural communities are certainly important, but the ways in which people think about and represent themselves and their community is just as significant for defining place (Bell 2007, Cramer 2016, Halfacree 2005). Participants in this study often expressed that they considered their community rural, regularly noting its "small town feeling", defining it in opposition to "concrete cities", and consistently expressing discontent with the lack of "things to do". This invokes understandings of rurality, but participants also spoke to the construction of physical space and their interactions with it in ways that are indicative of rural areas. When asked what they like about Mississippi, many of the kids brought up the open space that allows for outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and camping. It is also important to note the presence of material aspects often associated with rurality in this town, namely remnants of agricultural production, including trucks, farm equipment, and a couple of farm supply stores.

With over 20,000 people, the town that most Colvin Academy students and their families call home is not strictly 'rural' by definitions which rely on population, and its size certainly provides different resources and opportunities to construct community than are found in smaller towns. However, the town's representation as 'small', the lived experiences of residents who associate their experiences with understandings of rurality, and the material aspects associated with rurality (specifically the focus on agriculture) all indicate that Colvin Academy can be conceptualized as a rural school. Further, extant research on rural education has largely been concentrated in predominantly white areas and therefore lacks the attention to race and racial inequality that similar research in

urban areas has underlined as central to the way that the education system is organized in the United States. Colvin Academy provides a unique insight into the ways that race *and* class inform schooling, school choice, and comprehensive racial learning. Finally, conceptualizing Colvin Academy as a rural school will add to understandings of the ways in which local understandings about rurality inform how individuals view themselves as racial subjects (e.g., Leap 2017). Consequently, this research should be included in the rural sociological subfield so long as careful consideration is taken to distinguish how this town and the people in it differ from other rural contexts.

Sampling and Recruitment Strategies

I used theoretical (Glaser and Strauss 2004) snowball sampling techniques to recruit twenty white parents whose children attend a segregationist academy in a small town in Mississippi and twenty white children who attend the same school. By this, I mean that I worked to build my 'snowball' theoretically, paying attention to the data and what kinds of people need to be included in the study according to theoretical considerations. The parent and child participants are not all from the same families. Following IRB approval, participants were recruited through use of an email recruitment script or verbal recruitment that introduced the study as concerned with how parents and children understand private schooling and talk about controversial issues. The recruitment script included my contact information, information about my status as a Mississippi State University sociology graduate student, and a guarantee of confidentiality. It also stated that the interviews would be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed by me. The age range for child research participants is

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theoretically significant. Of course, children are defined legally as persons under the age of 18 in the United States, though many scholars point out that 'child', 'children', and 'youth' are socially constructed categories (Fothergill and Peek 2015). The minimum age criteria for children in this study was 8 years because children of this age are typically entering a developmental stage in which they are beginning to think in broader ideological terms (Damon and Hart 1988, Hagerman 2016, Meece 2002), and the oldest kids interviewed were 15.

Issues of Access in Sampling and Recruitment

Inclusion criteria for parents were open. As long as they are white and have a child or children who attend the segregationist school, they could be included in this research. I identified multiple nodes from which to begin my snowball sample and then gained subsequent referrals throughout the interview process. Due to my familiarity with this community, in some instances I interviewed parents and children that I knew prior to this study. This was beneficial in that rapport building was simplified and they felt more comfortable than those that do not know me beforehand. An additional benefit to using a snowball sample is that it allowed me to recruit participants, and particularly child participants, without having to rely upon traditional gatekeepers found in organizations like schools. However, I was aware of my positionality throughout this process and was aware of how my own identity and relationship to the participants shaped the data I produced as well as my interpretation of it.

Child participants were recruited through a similar email script sent to one of their parents, meaning they were essentially recruited through their parents. This is important

because the parents were primarily responsible for coordinating with me to determine a time and place for the interview. It also brings in issues of consent/assent in that there are often multiple layers of gatekeeping when conducting research with children (Best 2007). Considering that the parents acted as gatekeepers for their children in this study, the participation of the children rested first on the decision of the parents (e.g., Best 2007, Freeman and Mathison 2009). It is certainly possible that children who would want to participate were not given the chance to decide if their parents did not want them to. The opposite is also possible, which required additional sensitivity on my part to ensure that children who I met with actually wanted to be there and to cooperate (e.g., Freeman and Mathison 2009). One way that I enacted such sensitivity was to discuss and encourage nonparticipation in the case of discomfort, affording children the tools to actively dissent (e.g., Best 2007). To provide more opportunity for agency to the children, there was an additional document that could be sent to parents to aid them in explaining the research project to their children ahead of time (e.g., Freeman and Mathison 2009). However, it should also be recognized that children ultimately act as their own gatekeepers in deciding when/what/how much to share when participating in research (Mandell 1991).

In her study conducted in an elementary school on understandings of race, Lewis (2003) spoke with and observed school personnel to get a better sense of the racial climate of the school and how adults navigated it. Interviewing teachers and administration would certainly add rich information about how they conceptualize racial issues (or lack thereof) in a segregationist school and how this may be conveyed through a 'hidden curriculum', or one that encourages the reproduction of ideologies by normalizing them (e.g., Anyon

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2006). However, gaining access to teachers would presumably be difficult in this case, as the rhetoric around rural private schools is heavily politicized and many teachers would likely feel uncomfortable speaking to me without getting approval from the school first. The segregationist academy in this study has been particularly protective of how it is represented in recent years (even going so far as to ask parents to remove potentially controversial social media posts), in large part due to a local article challenging its racial homogeneity. For these reasons, I only spoke to parents and children enrolled in the school for my thesis.

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Data Generation and Analysis

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Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with parents generated in-depth information regarding the educational choices they make for their children and how they understand these choices in the context of the racial socialization of their children. Conducting similar interviews with children allowed for a richer understanding of how white children in the rural South discuss race and work through racial ideologies, especially given the context of the racially homogenous school they attend. Having data from both parents and children allowed me to begin to examine the ways in which white parents draw from broader racial ideologies and if/how they are reproduced and maintained among children. Persons under the age of 18 cannot legally consent to participate in research, so their parents were required to sign consent forms for them. However, it is imperative when doing research with children that they are taken seriously as research participants and that

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they are aware of the rights they have as such (Freeman and Mathison 2009, Hagerman 2010, Hunleth 2011), so I had them sign assent forms as well.

Building Rapport

The methodological considerations for building rapport with adults and children are different in many ways. To build rapport with the parents in this study, I had to present myself in a way that simultaneously acknowledges my insider and outsider statuses (e.g., Hagerman 2017). For example, I was able to capitalize on my insider status in the community and in Mississippi and the South more generally. However, my status as a non-parent allowed me to defer any initial anxiety parents may have felt when having their school choice questioned. I presented the question of school choice as one that I obviously do not understand from the perspective of a parent which was helpful in enabling them to 'tell me how it is' from that viewpoint (e.g., Hagerman 2017). Establishing rapport with children is critical, especially when talking to white kids about topics, such as race and inequality, that might make them uncomfortable (Hagerman 2017). Freeman and Mathison (2009) recommend conducting individual interviews with children when discussing sensitive topics. I worked to be aware of how comfortable child participants were, especially when asking about race directly. I also reminded them that they were allowed and encouraged to skip individual questions they did not like. Fortunately, Lewis and Hagerman (2016) argue that the best way to study racial ideology in interview studies with whites is to ask different questions at different points of the interview. So, if a child wanted to skip a question or two, there was certainly still enough data on racial views from other sections of the interview.

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Experts on child-centered research emphasize that the researcher should be warm, empathetic, and approachable, traits that would likely help in any interview, but are especially important in work with children (Fothergill and Peek 2015, Freeman and Mathison 2009). Keeping this in mind, I began interviews with questions that helped them 'warm up', such as, 'Tell me about your family. What do you like to do for fun together?'. I also used kid-friendly language, allowed them to become familiar with and ask questions about any recording device used, and took them seriously as participants in social research (e.g., Hunleth 2011). Most importantly, I did my best to make the interview a fun experience.

Conducting Research with Children

Though conducting research with children offers a unique set of challenges and perhaps some extra forethought, previous literature shows that children typically enjoy participating in interview studies (Clark 2011, Hagerman 2010). To address the power dynamics between child participants and myself, I very clearly explained the interview process before ever turning on a recorder (e.g., Clark 2011, Freeman and Mathison 2008). This included discussing the assent forms with them at length, stressing that they can stop the interview at any time with no consequences, the recording will only be heard by me, and that any publications that use things they say will have pseudonyms (e.g., Hagerman 2010). My presentation of self is also something that I was aware of and I decided early on that it would need to be different for parent and child interviews. Due to my age, I chose to present myself in a more professional and formal manner during parent interviews in hopes that they would take me more seriously as a social scientist and

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academic. In contrast, I wore more casual attire in interviews with children to present myself as a laid-back young adult rather than a serious and formal researcher (e.g., Best 2007).

If parents or guardians wanted to stay for the interview, I made it clear that they were welcome to do so. This allowed me to build rapport with the children and parents and make the interview experience more pleasant for all. Parents and/or children were also allowed to choose the location of the interview, which likely made them more comfortable and apt to share (Clark 2011). It should be noted that though the presence or absence of parents in interviews with children likely contributed to the generation of different responses and may make it more difficult to interpret children's perspectives (Freeman and Mathison 2009), neither situation would make the responses more objective or true, as interviews are created contextually between the interviewer and participant(s) (Holstein and Gubrium 2011). It is essential that this research represents accurately the voices of young people while acknowledging their agency in the research process and in the shaping and reproducing of racial ideologies (e.g., Thomson 2008).

Interviewing White Participants about Race

Interviewing white people about race is often a carefully played game, as it can be an uncomfortable topic with the potential to derail the entire interview. Sensitivity is required of the researcher, but even people who are comfortable discussing race are likely to use coded language to avoid sounding racist (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018). Lewis (2004) argues that in addition to anxiety and reservation whites may have when discussing race, they are also likely to struggle with articulating how race affects them on an institutional

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level as they are not often made to think critically about their own place in such issues (see also: DiAngelo 2011). Further, due to the belief in individualism (DiAngelo 2011), most whites do not believe they play a role in inequality, citing meritocratic values and denying the existence of white privilege (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008).

Race scholars have shown that in-depth interviews allow for a more complete picture of white racial attitudes than survey data (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000), especially when the researcher asks different types of questions about race at different points in the interview (Lewis and Hagerman 2016). Additionally, though it can seem counterproductive to ask about mundane activities in a study about race, Hughey (2012: 213) argues that "taken-for granted narratives" allow people to "explain social life in ways that rationalize a certain distribution of material and symbolic resources along particular racial lines." Finally, Lewis (2004: 642) notes that it is essential that "studies of whiteness not attempt to discuss racial discourse or 'culture' separate from a discussion of the material realities of racism". In other words, we should reject the use of methods that reinforce or leave unchallenged systems of white supremacy and domination (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008). It is imperative when studying how these parents and children discuss race that their perspectives are not detached from the material reality they live, or that of the maintenance of mostly and all-white social environments and how this use of whiteness sustains and creates privileges for them while disadvantaging people of color.

Data Analysis

As mentioned above, using an approach that acknowledges and implements the concept of situated knowledges (Haraway 1988), I conducted this research project with a

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cautious and critical view of how my positionality impacted the research project from the offset of constructing the initial interview guide all the way through data generation, analysis, and subsequent writing.

Transcript Analysis

The resulting interviews of this study were transcribed and analyzed by me, following an iterative approach to data analysis using the MAXQDA software. In her writing on grounded theory, Charmaz (2003) stresses the importance of in-vivo coding or utilizing the words and ideas of participants in code creation to build a more authentic and representative generation of data. Thus, for the first round of coding, I went through each transcript line-by-line, applying codes to help organize and categorize the data. Finally, I conducted focused coding which works to link the codes in conceptually and theoretically meaningful ways. Throughout the coding process, I practiced iterative memo writing which helped the reflexive linking of theory and data, as well as data generation.

Discourse Analysis

Because so much of this project is focused on the way that this particular school environment impacts comprehensive racial learning practices (e.g., Winkler 2012), it is important to discern the carefully constructed messages about race and racism that are formally presented by the school. To gain a better understanding of how the segregationist academy in this study represents its history as well as current educational and environmental aspirations, I also conducted a qualitative discourse analysis of the school's official website and most recent handbook. This also allowed for a better

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understanding of how the kids who attend this school either reproduce or rework such messages (e.g., Hagerman 2014). I worked to identify themes and paid particular attention to the language used in these materials. Following a similar approach to Hughey's (2012) analysis of white nationalist organization materials, I searched for content that demonstrates the ways in which the school formally presents understandings of race/race relations, specifically in how the school officially recognizes racial diversity and the reasons for its founding. My approach to this analysis focused not on what specific words were being used, but *how* they were being used and how this connects to broader ideological understandings of race and inequality.

Positionality

My status as a white, middle-class woman, as a graduate student, and as a lifelong Mississippian likely made the parents and children alike feel more comfortable discussing controversial topics, especially race, with me (Weiss 1995). For example, the parents in this study were quite defensive of their school choice as they knew it was perceived as racist by others. However, most of them did not seem to be concerned that I would share this sentiment. The first parent I interviewed told me about an article published in a local newspaper, mentioned above, that called into question the motivation for sending one's child to Colvin Academy. She shared this with me because the article made her angry, and the way she spoke to me about it indicated that she felt I would understand and join in her outrage. This article was actually incredibly helpful throughout the rest of the parent interviews and I used it as a tool to get at parents' attitudes towards accusations of racism, if they did not bring it up first. My status as a relatively young

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woman helped in scheduling and conducting interviews, likely because the kinds of people who babysit these kids tend to look like I do. It is quite likely that parents would not have been as comfortable with me interviewing their children if I were a man of the same age.

Additionally, the power dynamics between myself and the children must be acknowledged, especially due to my age and simultaneous status as a researcher (Hunleth 2011). Growing up in a small town myself presented its own advantages throughout the research process, particularly in that participants did not react to me as a liberal outsider affiliated with a university (e.g., Cramer 2016) but instead perceived me as a local, making them quite comfortable in sharing their resentment for things like big government and Hillary Clinton. For example, though many questions asked in interviews were designed to get a sense of participants' political views, I never asked who someone voted for in the 2016 election. It was therefore surprising to me that nearly every parent who participated told me in no uncertain terms why they voted for Trump and why they could never have voted for Clinton, without being prompted. Further, because I share a similar socioeconomic status to that of many of my participants, it was necessary to be critical of how such status impacts the lives, experiences, and viewpoints of the participants and what role(s) my own class background plays in data generation throughout the research process. Finally, my life in Mississippi was also an advantage in interviews, as I am accustomed not only to the local dialect but also to the specific ways in which rural Southerners often switch between coded mentions of race and explicitly racist sentiments.

Maintaining composure when hearing such sentiments is a skill that I have practiced and developed over many years of every day conversation.

Limitations

Though helpful in gaining access, my ties to the community put me even closer to the data than I already was, which certainly made it more challenging to see and pull out broad themes and to link them theoretically at times. Ultimately, the privileges I possess through my race, class, and gender identities aligned with many of the participants. This is something I had to remain cognizant of so that I could accurately represent how their experiences and perspectives recreate systems of inequality without neglecting the sometimes-concealed advantages of such experiences that I myself benefit from.

While interviews allow for in-depth data generation, they are limited in that they rely on the mood and honesty of the participant. Understanding how people conceptualize ideas is also limited with interviews, as we can only learn how these are expressed. We have no real look into the thought processes of our participants, especially those that they do not want to share. It is particularly difficult to examine how parents and children discuss racial issues, as interviews only allow for second-hand accounts of family conversations. Further, interviewing white people about whiteness and racial attitudes is often challenging, especially when they have never had to think about their place in a racialized system or about race at all. Conducting in-depth interviews comes with a unique set of challenges and limitations, but they are the most appropriate method for the approach I am taking to this research.

Colvin Academy's Official Position on its History and Race

Despite its explicitly racist history, Colvin Academy's website states that it was founded in 1969 to provide "quality education to families in [town] and the surrounding communities." It also positions itself as an "institution that respects family and Christian values and educates children through the use of a traditional curriculum." Besides a brief statement in the handbook stating that Colvin Academy does not "discriminate on the basis of race, religion, ethnic origin, disability or sex in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, athletics, and other school administered programs," the school does not address race, the racist history of the school, or the contemporary racial makeup in any official capacity. However, guidelines outlined in the school's handbook clearly delineate a certain type of school environment. For example, Colvin Academy prides itself on providing a "positive and safe learning environment," instilling "an appreciation for Christian culture and heritage," and fostering "moral integrity, intellectual capacity, and social conscience" in its students. While Colvin Academy's handbook and website position it as a school that espouses seemingly neutral values, what do parents actually think about the school's guidelines? Through parent responses, it is clear that these community values are actually entangled with specific understandings of race and class.

Why do Parents Choose Colvin Academy?

Despite Colvin Academy (CA) parents' general insistence that CA was the best school for their children, the same parents consistently and almost uniformly agreed that the school's academics are one of its biggest weaknesses.

Colvin Academy's Academics

While discussing Colvin Academy's strengths and weaknesses one afternoon over coffee, Tabitha Lewis told me:

> "Um, from what I hear, I like the opportunities they seem to have at the public school here. They seem to have a lot of um, advanced placement courses that I don't think Colvin Academy has yet. Although, the [CA] headmaster seems very motivated to include more, develop more, as far as the high school goes. It just seems to be a little bit more developed at the public school than it is at Colvin Academy. Also, the um, ACT scores that I hear coming out of the public schools seem to be a little higher than Colvin Academy. Just from what I've heard."

Like Tabatha, most parents mentioned that the local public school has more educational opportunities, including a much wider range of Advanced Placement (AP) courses. As Jade Lee put it, "Um, I think our ACT scores are awful, and I think that is something that the school needs to start working on big time. Um, but I think that's just an overall lack of focus on academics that needs to be improved." Many parents pointed to Colvin Academy's supposed lack of resources to explain the school's weak academics. Stephanie King further explained this logic, explaining that Colvin Academy cannot offer the pay and benefits needed to keep 'good' teachers. "Um, weaknesses are academics in

the high school, I think. Just because I don't think they have enough money to pay- what like, a really good teacher- would need to pay- would need to make, you know, and benefits and all that kinda stuff", Stephanie told me. She is not wrong in her assertion that public schools often have the resource to hire more qualified teachers than private schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), the average salary for public school teachers in the 2012-2013 school year was over $10,000 higher per year than that of private school teachers. Further, a 1997 review by the U.S. Department of Education found that public school teachers tend to be more qualified than private school teachers as measured by teaching experience and educational attainment (Riley et al. 1997).

Stephanie was not the only parent to point to resources when discussing educational disparities between the two schools. Randy Turner explained his take on the issue,

> "Because the curriculum is much broader at Colvin High School. They've got courses at Colvin High School that are not available at Colvin Academy, never will be. Simply because of money. Also, uh, in some cases, you're gonna have better teachers, more qualified teachers at Colvin High School than you are at Colvin Academy."

Randy agreed that Colvin Academy cannot offer the same kind of educational resources as the local public school, though he later argued, "Again, as I said before, it depends on what a student wants in his life. If he wants to be uh, you know, heart surgeon, never gonna study, doesn't matter where he goes to school." Randy ultimately insisted that one

could get the same kind of education at both schools if only he/she worked hard enough, even though they do not offer the same level of educational opportunities. Though CA parents spend a hefty amount of money to send their kids to this school, many parents, like Randy, insisted that the school simply does not have enough financial resources to offer the same academic opportunities as the local public school. Similar to the findings of Johnson (2015), CA parents recognized that financial resources matter for the type of education children get, yet they continued to assert that ultimately, individual merit is the only thing that matters. Randy is using a belief in meritocracy to minimize what *he* referred to as the "disservice" he did to his daughters and grandsons by sending them to Colvin Academy. However, as will be discussed later, parents also used this to justify their family's role in the reproduction of inequality.

So, if parents are so quick to admit that Colvin Academy has weak academics and teachers compared to the local high school, it begs the question: why are they spending thousands of dollars per semester to send their child to this school, especially given its racist history and poor contemporary reputation? Drawing on Hagerman's (2018) theoretical concept of 'justified avoidance,' I identified seven main reasons parents gave to justify their school choice, including religion, the promotion of the 'right' kind of values, a fear of government control/intervention, the ability of parents to be directly involved in decision-making within the school, perceptions of safety, a shared sense of community, and less competitive sports programs.

Religion

Though Colvin Academy is not officially affiliated with any one church or denomination, it is well-known in town as a school that believes in and promotes Protestant Christianity. Jade Lee explains, "I like having a school that is Christian-based and has Christian values. I think that's important for kids to be able to start the day with a prayer and be able to have Bible study at school." Teaching about Christianity seems to be a priority of the school that goes beyond a morning prayer and devotion (or a daily Bible study) led by teachers. Julia Cooper told me about the kinds of lessons her daughter gets in kindergarten, "…I love- especially my kindergartner will come home every day and tell me about the Bible story they're studying, and you know, how they're using it with what letters they're doing or whatever." However, the use of Christianity does not stop at a daily devotion or Bible story. Indeed, it is woven into the academic lessons at Colvin Academy as well, as children are taught how the Bible story they are reading in class relates to something as simple as learning letters and numbers. It is also a part of the every-day culture of the school, as Stephanie King explains:

> "Like, even in elementary school, when they would say the blessing [or prayer] before they went to lunch, and, you know what, maybe they let them do that in the public schools too, or other schools. I realize it's my responsibility to take my children to church and to teach them everything concerning that, but I mean, look, I'll take all the help I can get."

Of course, Christianity can be practiced by students in any school, but, like Stephanie, many CA parents specifically mentioned how much they liked that students and teachers can practice together in a private school setting. Stephanie's thoughts also demonstrate

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that some parents view school as another potential tool for the religious growth of their children, meaning that they value that their children are receiving messages rooted in Protestant Christianity at school as well as at home. Notably, Nevin and Bills (1976) documented the use of this exact argument by the segregationists who formed most of these academies in the first place. They wrote, "The broadening or enriching qualities which one might feel a modern world demands of a modern curriculum are dismissed as time wasters that implant 'wrong' ideas in student's minds anyway and are contributing to a decline in the quality of American life" (Nevin and Bills 1976: 67). This sentiment is echoed in the arguments that many CA parents make for choosing this school, including the attractive religious aspect of Colvin Academy as well as its propensity to espouse the 'right' kind of values, as discussed below.

Most Colvin Academy parents used religion to justify choosing this school. However, another local school in town offers an even stronger religious foundation, an official affiliation with a church, and much cheaper tuition (essentially half of what Colvin Academy families pay). As such, one might assume these parents would choose the local Christian school, given their stated preferences. When I asked parents about this, Jaclyn Green explained her view:

> "I would say the reason I didn't consider [the local Christian school] is it to me it's almost too- not too religious, that's not the right word. But it is a Christian school and I don't think that's the decision I would have made. Which sort of sounds weird because one of the things I'm sure I'll tell you is one of the things I

like about Colvin Academy is the religious aspect of it. So, it just is too far on the

other end."

Like Jaclyn, many parents found religion to be an important element of school choice but

perceived the local Christian school to be *too* religious. Further, Jaclyn's assertion that

the local Christian school is "too far on the other end" points to this school's reputation of

being very strict (for example, this school does not allow backpacks with pictures

depicting celebrities or cartoon characters as this is considered to be sinful- i.e.,

worshipping man-made idols). As will be discussed in more detail below, part of the

attraction of Colvin Academy is the control parents have over their children's educational

environment. The local Christian school offers the Christian teachings so many Colvin

Academy parents value, but without the level of parental interference accommodated and

even encouraged by Colvin Academy. Of course, religion is not the only aspect of school

choice that Colvin Academy parents pointed to when justifying their decision, though it

was a common theme.

Colvin Academy Promotes the 'Right' Kind of 'Family Values'

When discussing their school choice, many parents pointed to Colvin Academy's

promotion of the 'right' kind of 'family values' to express their satisfaction with the

school and the other families there. Brandon Stewart attributes Colvin Academy's

promotion of the 'right' kind of values to its Christian foundation, stating, "I like that it's

a Christian environment and that Christian values are promoted there. Not that mistakes

aren't made and that there aren't problems with students, faculty, families, etcetera. But

that, you know, we're able to voice Christianity." Brandon's statement is indicative of a

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belief that Colvin Academy families do not have the kinds of 'problems' associated with children who attend the public school.

Many Colvin Academy parents also noted the perceived lack of religious freedom in public schools to justify their school choice, often recounting horror stories of kids getting in trouble or sports teams being fined for praying on public school property. Brandon's wife, Stacey, elaborated further on this point while struggling to marry it with the desire for her children to experience diverse backgrounds.

> "I wanted the Christian background you know, and- not (sighs) I mean I want my kids to know that they're not the only- I mean, that not everybody in the world looks like us or whatever. But in kindergarten, I didn't want them to have to find out that not everybody knew who their dad was or something, you know?"

Brandon and Stacey, though interviewed separately, both expressed that they wanted their kids to go to school with children from the 'right' kind of families. It is clear from Stacey's statement that she is drawing on racialized understandings of what constitutes a 'proper' family. Following the Moynihan report, political and social movements with liberal and conservative leanings have pointed to the stereotypical 'absent black father' as the cause of family breakdown and societal degradation for decades (Alexander 2012, Edin and Nelson 2014, Roberts 1997, 2002, Wilson 1987). However, when considering the role of institutional racism, poverty, gendered understandings of parenthood, and mass incarceration, it becomes clear that black fathers are not to blame and that this notion is nothing more than a racist trope (e.g., Alexander 2012, Edin and Nelson 2014, Roberts 1997, 2002). Further, research shows that marginalized fathers (i.e., fathers of

color and/or economically marginalized fathers) are typically deeply invested in their status and role as fathers (Coontz 2016, Edin and Nelson 2014).

Of course, the kinds of 'family values' espoused by many Colvin Academy parents were not just about understandings of race. Parents also drew on homophobic rhetoric when discussing their 'ideal' school environment. As Sarah Wall explained,

"You know, in the day and age that we're living in, you just- especially with Common Core, the curriculum that's going through the schools, you just- we feel like there's a good filter there. Um, not that they're being completely sheltered, or you know, hidden from it but I don't have to worry about them getting stories about homosexuality being okay, or you know, things like that. It's the Biblical principles that we're teaching at home, so it coincides with what we're teaching."

Clearly, Sarah does not want her children to learn about families headed by same-sex couples, positing these relationships as inherently inappropriate and 'not okay.' As discussed below, other parents similarly expressed discomfort with their children being exposed to gay families as well as teen pregnancy and divorced and single-parent families. These notions were distinctly tied to the families' Christian backgrounds and they ultimately reinforce justifications for the oppression, or at the very least, avoidance, of people who are not 'like them'.

When parents make distinctions between what constitutes a 'good' versus 'bad' family, they are employing the same racist, sexist, and homophobic rationale that has been used throughout U.S. history to systematically disenfranchise same-sex parents, families of color, and/or families who are economically marginalized (see: Alexander

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2012, Coontz et al. 2008, Coontz 2016, Fetner 2011, Raleigh 2018, Roberts 1997, 2002, Solinger 2005). Though it may seem harmless when used in discussions meant to justify school choice, the reproduction of these sentiments ultimately contributes to the continued use of policy to discriminate against those who are not deemed 'worthy' of the right to full citizenship, liberty, or even their own family. Ultimately, the 'context of childhood' that Colvin Academy parents have set up for their children is one that refuses to engage with discussions concerning the oppression of LGBTQ+ people and families, families of color, families headed by single parents, etc., and worse, condones such injustice under the guise of 'family values'.

Distrust of Government in Public Schools

Many parents justified their segregated school choice through the expression of a distrust of the governmental influence in public schools. Of course, some parents drew on religion and perceived religious freedom (or lack thereof) when discussing this topic. For instance, Stacey Stewart told me, "And I mean, I know the public schools around here, now don't say Christmas holidays, they call it winter break or whatever, you know. And so, to me, that's just kind of another step down the line of pushing- pushing religion or you know, out of everything." Stacey is speaking specifically to the government's role in establishing a school environment that does not cater to Protestant Christianity. The parents I spoke with often expressed discomfort with the thought of their child being in a 'non-denominational' environment, or one which, at the very least, attempts to provide a neutral educational experience that does not favor any one religion over others. Amy Cook shared similar thoughts, stating,

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"You know, with the state of (Laughs) the government today, you never know what you are- depending on, you know, who's elected, they may quit saying the Pledge of Allegiance, they may not- you know, obviously, they've taken prayer out of public school. Um, to me, it was just scary letting the government have that much control of my child's education… You know, and if anybody does ask me, 'Why are you sending your kids to Colvin Academy?' You know, it's because I want to have a say in my child's education. I don't want the government telling my children what they will and will not do based on a whim of somebody who's offended."

Amy's understanding of government intervention in public schools is very similar to that of the original segregationists who founded these schools (e.g., Andrews 2002, Fuquay 2002, Nevin and Bills 1976). Fuquay (2002: 160) writes, "…segregation academies were designed to protect segregationist beliefs from a national political culture that increasingly viewed white supremacy as evil and its defenders as un-American…Segregationist parents hoped to recreate the social, cultural, and ideological environment of their own upbringing and thus nurture in their children a set of beliefs then being rejected by the outside world." Ironically, in a national climate in which conservatives mock the implementation of safe spaces as an attack on free speech by 'liberal snowflakes' (see: Hess 2017, Serwer 2017), Amy chooses to pay hefty tuition fees to send her kids to a school with people who share the same values she does to avoid dealing with the wishes of people who are no longer tolerant of the often racist, sexist, and homophobic rhetoric that has been foundational to United States public schooling

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(see: Delpit 1998, Ferguson 2003, Fields 2008, Fine and McClelland 2016, Lewis 2003, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Oakes 2005, Orenstein 2000, Pascoe 2007, Pellegrine 2018, Portelli 1993).

Of course, this is not an isolated incident as many Colvin Academy parents expressed the desire to have a direct 'say' in their child's education, which maps onto extant literature concerning the ways in which white, class-privileged parents interact with schools. Whether through manipulating the very structure of schools to "institutionalize and maintain white privilege" (Lewis and Diamond 2015:134, see also: Oakes 2005, Posey-Maddox 2014), by utilizing wealth to select neighborhoods with the 'best' schools, or to opt out of public schooling all together (e.g., Hagerman 2018, Johnson 2015), white, class-privileged parents consistently interfere with educational practices to secure unearned advantages for their children.

Parental Intervention

Though consistent with previous research, it is notable that Colvin Academy parents are so invested in the ability to intervene with their child's education that they chose a school with expensive tuition fees and an admittedly weak academic record. Indeed, many parents shared stories of times that they had directly influenced school decisions. After discussing the 'worldliness' of the Common Core curriculum, Sarah Wall explained how she got a book about "out-of-wedlock" teen pregnancy pulled from her son's seventh-grade reading list,

> "So that's why we like Colvin Academy, you know. You just- you don't have
>
> control of that in the public-school system. If you called and complained about the

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public school, they'd be like 'Oh, whatever'. You know, cause you're not paying for it. You know, your taxes are but you're not really paying for it. Whereas, at Colvin Academy, if you have a problem with the curriculum, you can go to the administrators and say 'I don't think this is appropriate for a Christian school' or whatever. Cause I even had an issue back when Gabriel was in seventh-grade with something they were reading. And that was [the headmaster's] first year and he said 'Well, did you go to the principal?'. So, I went to the principal first and talked about it. They ended up pulling the curriculum because it had been approved years ago, no one had questioned it since and it just was not appropriate for seventh-graders."

Not only did Sarah successfully get a book completely eliminated from the seventh-grade curriculum, she felt entitled to do so specifically because she pays to send her kids to this school. Of course, research has shown that even class-privileged white parents who choose public schools share in this entitlement as they perceive their children to be the 'good' kids compared to children of color and/or economically marginalized children (Lewis and Diamond 2015). It is important, though, to recognize that this entitlement is seemingly doubled among Colvin Academy parents as they embrace understandings of who is more 'deserving' of what they perceive to be a morally-righteous education (e.g., Johnson 2015). This is directly tied to the racialization of black and brown children which posits their white counterparts as inherently innocent and in need of protection (e.g., Ferguson 2003, Roberts 2002, Woodhouse 2008).

Further, Sarah is drawing on understandings of single-parenthood which are ultimately informed by a long history of legislation rooted in white patriarchal supremacy (e.g., Baca Zinn et al. 2015, Roberts 1997, 2002, Thornton Dill 2008). Specifically, many U.S. leaders have blamed the presence of single motherhood in the black community for the 'breakdown' of the black family, which has, in turn, been blamed for the marginalized position of black peoples (e.g., Edin and Nelson 2013, Roberts 1997, 2002). In this way, the notion that single parenthood is 'inappropriate' for middle schoolers to discuss works to perpetuate racist and sexist ideas about 'good' vs. 'bad' families while also pointedly ignoring the historical and contemporary disenfranchisement of the black community and black families *by the U.S. government* (see: Alexander 2012, Coontz 2016, Massey and Denton 1993, Oliver and Shapiro 2006, Roberts 1997, 2002). As stated above, in choosing Colvin Academy for their children, CA parents construct a 'context of childhood' that ignores matters of social inequality and justice for many groups. Sarah's insistence on the removal of 'inappropriate' curriculum demonstrates that this construction does not end with school choice as parents continue to inform this 'context of childhood' throughout their child(ren)'s educational career.

Though Sarah was concerned with the school's curriculum, Colvin Academy parents also intervened in some of the more social aspects of daily school life. Claire Scott offers an example:

"Well, what my husband likes about Colvin Academy is there's not a bureaucracy. I mean, you can go talk to the person who has the power to make a decision. I mean, I remember when Anthony was in- I think it was in pre-K. He

started as a four-year-old. And he came home, and they were fighting over a ball because they'd all rush- all the boys wanted the ball. And they only had like one or two balls. So, I called [the elementary principal] and I said. 'There's not enough balls on the playground and it's causing conflict' and she said 'Okay, I'll go to Walmart and I'll buy five more balls'. And you know, in the public school, it would have been like- (Laughs)…a whole thing."

It could certainly be argued that school personnel should be accessible to address parental concerns. However, Colvin Academy parents specifically enjoy being able to intervene as much as they would like in whatever affairs they find important, whether that be aspects of the curriculum they perceive to be inappropriate or the amount of balls on the playground. They also recognize that the access they have to school personnel, especially teachers, is beneficial to their child's education. Karla Shaw explains how this has helped her daughter keep up with her peers academically,

"You know, I think [the small class size has] been, certainly, conducive to Savannah staying up to speed with her peers. Um, having the smaller class and having the teachers that will send me a text message or call me and say 'Hey, Savannah may need more help with this', you know. Just the more individualized attention and getting- the teachers knowing her and her personality."

Karla was one of many parents who told me that they keep in close contact with their children's teachers, monitoring academic progress as well as behavior.

Lewis and Diamond (2015: 155) find that the white public school parents in their study, "… are still fully participating in the racial hierarchy and work to ensure their

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children's privileged status." Notably, Colvin Academy represents a completely different context as a segregationist school in rural Mississippi than Riverview, the racially and economically diverse public school studied by Lewis and Diamond (2015). Colvin Academy parents, who have chosen a predominantly white school which has already been carefully cultivated to fit the needs of this very homogenous population, still participate in opportunity hoarding for their children (e.g., Lewis and Diamond 2015), demonstrating just how pervasive this practice is among white, class-privileged parents. This is especially salient given the simultaneous insistence that America is a meritocratic nation by CA parents and parents in general (e.g., Johnson 2015). If Colvin Academy parents truly believed that merit was the most important factor in educational success, surely they would not spend such extensive amounts of time and resources to secure advantages for their children. However, most Colvin Academy parents told me they were instantly attracted to the small size of the school and classes (though it should be noted that the local public school has a student-teacher ratio of 17:1, only marginally higher than CA's 14:1 (NCES1 2016). It is likely that Colvin Academy parents found this feature attractive not because it meant that they would no longer 'have' to participate in opportunity hoarding, but because they knew it would therefore be easier. So, though parents consistently drew on meritocratic ideology, most of them did whatever they could to secure their child's access to what they perceived to be the 'best' education in a school that they described as academically inadequate. This maps on to Johnson's (2015: 54) findings. She writes, "These interviews reveal the power of the ideology of the American Dream, for even when it flew in the face of lived reality, even when it contradicted actual

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experiences, the parents interviewed still believed in it, guided their actions by it, and used it to explain the situations of themselves, their children, and others." Further, the fact that parents so often shared these stories with me demonstrates the importance of such intervention to their perceptions of what it means to be a 'good' parent (e.g., Johnson 2015).

Safety

Notably, parents also pointed to the small size of the school as a way to ensure a more 'like-minded' community and often explained that they felt their kids were safer at Colvin Academy than they would be at the public schools. For example, Amy Cook said, "Like I said, you know, certain things will really open your eyes as to 'I want my children safe' and I want somebody that's going to look after them. It puts them in an environment where I know that I can trust the other children too, you know." Amy's comment implies a racialized understanding of which kinds of children can be deemed 'trustworthy' enough to share a classroom with her white children. Again, this notion is directly connected to the perceived innocence of white children in contrast to the inherently 'dangerous' children of color one might encounter in a racially diverse public school (e.g., Ferguson 2003, Roberts 1997, 2002, Woodhouse 2008).

Being able to 'trust' the other children was certainly important to most parents, and they typically agreed that this was easier to do in an environment like Colvin Academy. Kendall Bennett expressed similar thoughts, stating, "I would say this, that one of the nice things is at football games, the school is like one big family and at football games I don't have to watch my kids. I can turn them loose. Whereas, I don't know at a

big public school I would feel comfortable doing that." Of course, virtually every parent would want to know their kids are safe when at school, but the ways that white parents understand safety are often racialized, equating 'safer' with 'whiter' (e.g., Holmes 2002, Johnson 2015, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Saporito and Lareau 1999). Keeping in mind that the local public school is over 70% black, it is clear that Colvin Academy parents have a racialized perception of what constitutes a safe environment for their children. This perception coincides with understandings of racialized space in the U.S. more generally (e.g., Anderson 2000).

In fact, it became clear that Colvin Academy parents often 'reimagined' black spaces as inherently more dangerous due to the presence of their white children. While discussing how her family had chosen Colvin Academy, Sarah Wall told me,

> "If we lived in [the county that Colvin Academy is located in], I'll be honest with you, we'd probably have our kids, at this point because of our finances, in the public schools. But we live in [nearby] county. And [nearby] county public schools are not an option. I mean, our kids wouldn't even survive the bus ride. I mean, we've just- we've heard nightmares about it".

The nearby county Sarah is referring to has one public school that has a student-teacher ratio of 14:1 (NCES 2018), identical to Colvin Academy's typical class size, a feature Sarah noted as a 'blessing'. This particular public school is also 84% black and 15% white (NCES 2018). Further, Sarah was one of the few parents in this study that admitted to me how much her family struggles to pay Colvin Academy's tuition. Sending her kids to the public school in their county, which is also where her husband works, would likely

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make life easier for them, especially in terms of finance and daily travel time. However, her decision to make the sacrifice and send them to Colvin Academy anyway was rooted in imagining *her* kids on those public-school buses filled with children of color.

Beth Gadson tells a similar story, except that her daughter did at one time attend the local public school. When telling me how she made the decision to switch to Colvin Academy, Beth said,

> "I went and ate lunch with [Brittany] and she was just sitting by herself. Um, there was one little- another student- little white girl that she had been friends with, but she was sitting by somebody else. So, she's sitting all by herself at a whole table full of little black kids which weren't ever an issue. I mean, I have black friends. She's got- she's still got black friends. There's a girl that comes over here all the time and we have playdates. So, that wasn't the issue. It was just the who- the issue was she was the only one at the table and all these little kids were just like monkeys climbing all over the table. And like, they spilt my drink out of my hand, they were bumping into me. And she just looked so miserable. And I said, 'Is this kinda how it is every day?' and she looked at me like she was about to cry, and she said 'Yeah'. And I was like 'That's it' so, left there, went to Colvin Academy".

Despite Beth's repeated assertions that race was not part of her decision to move her daughter to Colvin Academy, she points to this moment as the final straw. Unlike Sarah, Beth did not have to imagine her white daughter in a racially diverse space; she saw it for herself. Seeing her daughter surrounded by children of color, who she refers to as

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'monkeys', and being isolated from her one white friend was too much for Beth, who then made an appointment to tour Colvin Academy *the same day*. She also confided that during previous visits to the public school, she had heard her daughter's teacher use African American Vernacular English (the teacher had instructed a student to "shut the do'") and was therefore already worried. Though Beth claims that her decision was 'not racist' as she and her daughter have "black friends", it is clear that this is very much about race and wanting to 'rescue' her white daughter from a mostly-black space.

Sarah's assertion that her kids would not "survive the bus ride" and Beth's quick action to move schools after seeing her daughter surrounded by black children in a lunch room are indicative of the belief that black children are dangerous and more adult-like than white kids. Again, this belief is rooted in the racialization of black children throughout U.S. history (see: Ferguson 2003, Roberts 1997, 2002, Woodhouse 2008). In her work on the 'making of back masculinity' in public schools, Ferguson (2003: 81) writes, "Historically, the existence of African American children has been constituted differently through economic practices, the law, social policy, and visual imagery. This difference has been projected in an ensemble of images of black youth as not childlike". She then goes on to argue that through these images, black children are "adultified", meaning that, "… their transgressions are made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté" (Ferguson 2003: 83). The adultification of black children, particularly black boys, has life-altering consequences, including disproportionately high rates of detention, suspension, and expulsion in schools (Ferguson 2003) and much higher rates of being tried in adult courts

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as juveniles (Roberts 2002, Woodhouse 2008), all for behavior that is remarkably similar to that of their white peers.

A Sense of Like-Minded Community

Beyond a safe environment, parents had specific ideas about the kind of people who constitute 'their' community. Myra Morgan shared her thoughts on this, explaining,

"Um, when I was thinking about potential questions that you might ask, one of the things that came to mind is it really is a community of people, you know, of families. I love the fact that we don't know everybody by any means, you know, but I think we know that it's the kind of school that you can be involved, and a lot of other parents feel that same way. That we want to um, we all want our children to receive a great education, so that's why we're there. You know, to do whatever we can to help make the school better. Just that kind of close-knit community, that I don't know that you can- I think you can get it at larger schools, but I like that we feel that way."

Myra likes that the other parents at Colvin Academy are all involved and share a desire for their children to receive a good education. Her insistence that CA parents are more invested in their kids' school than parents who choose larger schools speaks to the racialized belief that some, namely black, parents do not care about education. This belief is firmly entrenched in cultural racism, which posits that, "…minorities' standing is a product of their lack of effort, loose family organization, and inappropriate values" rather than a symptom of the racialized social system they live in (Bonilla-Silva 2018: 88) and has often been used by whites to explain away the role that racial inequality plays within

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and between schools, as well as the different educational/life chances of children of color (e.g., Hagerman 2018, Johnson 2015, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Oakes 2005). However, empirical evidence suggests that such racial inequality actually stems not from levels of parental investment but in the difficulty of navigating institutions which value white, class-privileged styles of interaction and capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1974, Bowles and Gintis 1976, Delpit 1988, Ferguson 2003, Lewis 2004, Noguera 2003). In using rhetoric to justify their school choice that employs racist and classist assumptions about what kinds of children and families are 'trustworthy' and 'invested' in the institution of education, Colvin Academy parents are not only misunderstanding the causes of social inequality but are actively contributing to them. Ultimately, they are constructing a 'context of childhood' that reinforces ideological justifications for racial inequality while simultaneously directing resources *to* white children and *away* from children of color.

Less Competitive Sports

The final issue Colvin Academy parents had with the larger public school in town was the competitive nature of its sports programs. Messner (1995, 2000, 2011) has extensively examined the ways in which sports and gender socialization inform one another, but scholarship attempting to explore the relationship between school choice and sports is largely lacking, which makes it even more striking that so many Colvin Academy parents justified their school choice by pointing to the school's athletic program. Due to its small size, Colvin Academy offers a less competitive selection of sport opportunities, with many students playing two or more sports at a time. As Jade Lee explained, "And I think that [the local public school has] a stronger, um, sports program.

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That being said, a stronger sports program is great for a really strong athlete, it might not be great for your average child." Parents often expressed that their children would not be able to play the sports they wanted to at a larger, more diverse school. Similarly, Jaclyn Green said, "My kids aren't likely to be super star athletes. But by leaving them at Colvin Academy, they're going to get a chance to try that. …They're gonna get a lot of chances to try stuff that I don't know that you'd get in a bigger place." While parents are pointing to the size differences between the private and public schools to explain the less competitive nature of Colvin Academy sports teams, there is a racialized understanding of athleticism that also plays a role in this distinction.

Evan Carter expresses this sentiment more explicitly by saying, "When my son was playing seventh-grade basketball, they went and played [a nearby public-school team]. [In] Seventh-grade, they'd never played against black kids- they were- it's just an unknown to them. So, they were a little bit scared- that's just- that's just an unknown." While the belief that black children are necessarily better athletes than white children may not seem racist to some from the outset, it is ultimately rooted in eugenicist ideas. Eugenics is the racist 'science' that was historically used to try and prove/explain the non-existent 'biological' differences between races and was certainly an integral part of the racialization of black bodies (Roberts 1997). Racialization, or the extension of meaning to a relationship, social practice, or group, is not a linear process (Omi and Winant 2015) and has been used in different ways throughout U.S. history to justify the abuse and oppression of black bodies (see: Collins 2006, 2015, Haney- López 2006, Jung and Almaguer 2000, Roberts 1997, Smedley and Smedley 2005, Ward 2014).

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Messner (2011) argues that youth sports have become a vehicle through which the 'soft essentialist' ideas about gender differences, particularly that boys are 'naturally' inclined to exhibit traits valued in sports such as aggression and hyperactivity while girls in 'modern' contexts can opt-in to these behaviors for the purpose of playing a sport. While Messner (2011) uses this in a discussion of how youth sports are informed by/inform ideas about gender, this work could certainly be extended to racialized understandings of athleticism. The racialization of black bodies has always posited them as 'closer to nature than whites', typically through the argument that black people are naturally uncivilized and less intelligent (see: Collins 2006, Du Bois Mills 1997, Roberts 1997, Smedley and Smedley 2005). Further, scholars have found that these long-standing stereotypes continue to inform contemporary understandings of athleticism (Harris 2000, Hoberman 1997, Hylton 2015, Miller 1998). Colvin Academy parents are drawing on ideas of 'natural' black athleticism (including aggression) to argue that the 'opting-in' of their white children to these behaviors would simply not be enough to ensure enough field time. Instead, CA parents use their resources to put their kids in a school where they will not be made to compete with many black athletes, therefore increasing their chances to be able to participate on whatever sports teams they wish. The continued belief in the 'natural' athletic ability of black people drawn upon by Colvin Academy parents only works to reinforce ideas about 'biological' differences between races and contribute to the continued racialization of black bodies (e.g., Harris 2000, Miller 1998).

Many would argue that 1969, the year in which Colvin Academy was founded, was a long time ago and therefore that the culture of the school has likely changed. And

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yet, though most Colvin Academy parents pointed to any reason but race when justifying their school choice, all of the reasons they provided were deeply racialized. Given this, how do these parents then explain the school's explicitly racist history?

How Parents Explain the Racial Makeup of the School

When discussing the history of Colvin Academy, it was difficult for parents to deny the school's segregationist origins. Sarah Wall provided her perception of this history, stating, "And see, you know, back in the sixties when a lot of these schools opened, that was the concept behind them was white flight schools. Was to get the white kids out of the public schools, get them protected, you know whatever." Though Sarah recognized why the school was formed, she seemed sympathetic to the cause as evidenced by her conviction that white flight schools were formed to 'protect' white kids. She then went on to justify the contemporary racial makeup, telling me, "You know, I don't think anybody just says, 'I'm putting my kid in this school because it's a predominantly white school'. We don't live in that kinda world anymore." Sarah is implying that no one would admit to choosing a school on the basis of race anymore. However, Sarah's statement is unsupported by empirical evidence, as white parents tend to choose the whitest schools for their children all over the United States (see: Hagerman 2018, Holmes 2002, Johnson 2015, Saporito and Lareau 1999).

Myra Morgan, who had earlier told me that Colvin Academy was founded to offer a strong community and academics, separates this choice even further from historical reality by stating, "Um, I- you know, sometimes people try to fuel some sort of fire. I think it was like a very 1950's type notion to suggest that people would only send their

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kids to a private school um, you know, to be a racially motivated, you know, type school." It is unsurprising that Myra, who did not acknowledge that Colvin Academy was founded on segregationist principles, also suggests that white flight is a '1950's type notion', though most segregationist academies were founded in the late 60's and early 70's (e.g., Munford 1973, Fuquay 2002) and many are still in operation today (e.g., Porter et al. 2014).

Some parents understood that the school's past could be used to criticize it in a contemporary context but did not think it was a particularly useful or fair characterization. Indeed, even parents who admitted to the school's history were quick to deny that race is still a factor in choosing Colvin Academy. For instance, Randy Turner explained,

> "…when Colvin Academy was founded in early- in the 70's, the reason it was, was because of race. That's not the case now. Uh, race is not an issue at Colvin Academy. Like I said before, if you want to pay your money, you go to Colvin Academy. It's not more expensive for an African American to go than it is for a white to go there. Uh, they receive the same education, they do the same things. Uh, uh, they're all friends. So, uh, I don't feel that race is an issue anymore."

Randy's comments are indicative of the ways that many Colvin Academy parents understand and justify the school's contemporary racial makeup. However, some parents completely denied the salience of race when choosing Colvin Academy.

Julia Cooper discussed her frustrations about the recent local article (mentioned in the Chapter 4) challenging the school's predominantly white population, saying, "Um,

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the article obviously made it sound like, 'If you send your children to the private school here, you are a racist and that's all there is to it'. Um, I grew up in the Delta, I know racist. I mean, I do. I- I've seen it, I know it. Um, it infuriates me." Clearly upset, Julia compares her children's upbringing to her own, drawing on understandings of rurality to posit that a poorer, more scarcely populated place is where racism *really* happens (e.g., Bell 1997, Hartigan 2013, Hubbs 2014, Jarosz and Lawson 2002, Shirley 2010, Winders 2003, Wray 2006). Hubbs (2014) argues that class-privileged whites often draw distinctions between themselves and their working-class counterparts to deny accusations of racism, which ultimately works to hide racism and bigotry among the privileged who have more power to disrupt structural racism. Though most Colvin Academy families I interviewed understood their town as a rural setting, almost all of them made similar distinctions between themselves and the 'true' bigots, who live in even more 'rural' areas. This speaks to the unique position this town is in as parents here, especially those who can afford to send their kids to Colvin Academy, have the ability to simultaneously recognize their lived experience as one that is 'rural' and draw on understandings of rurality to villainize smaller rural areas. In this way, they often use the material differences between their town and other smaller towns in Mississippi to enjoy all of the positive aspects associated with rurality such as a closeness to nature and a sense of belonging to a tight-knit community (e.g., Bell 2007), while also distancing themselves from the negative aspects associated with rurality, namely the notion that people in rural areas are more likely to be racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. (e.g., Ashwood 2018, Bell

1997, Hartigan 2013, Hubbs 2014, Jarosz and Lawson 2002, Shirley 2010, Winders 2003, Wray 2006).

Further, like many parents, Julia pointed specifically to individual-level racism, reflecting a particular understanding of what constitutes racism. In recent decades, many race scholars have moved away from purely psychological explanations of racism and prejudice and have argued for a perspective that allows for a structural understanding of inequality (Bobo 1999, Bobo et al. 1997, Bonilla-Silva 1997, Blumer 1958, Gold 2004, Mills 1997, Pincas 1996). Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues that a psychological approach alone does not do enough to address the real-life impediments to the life chances of marginalized groups, covert forms of racism, or the ways that racism and the racial hierarchy are subject to change and part of the social structure. To combat this, he argues for the conceptualization of a racialized social system, or a recognition that the economic, political, and ideological spheres of society are "partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races" (p. 469). Under such a social system, whites have maintained their place at the top of the hierarchy by defining self through the construction of the 'other' while also dominating the 'other' (Lewis 2004). If Colvin Academy parents only conceptualize racism to be an individual-level problem, it will be much more difficult for them to recognize their place in the racial hierarchy and their own role in the reproduction of racial inequality.

For many parents, the salience of race is ultimately difficult to deny given the school's contemporary racial makeup. As Kendall Bennett explained, "You know, all of these schools were formed out of desegregation, all of them. So, you know, I think they

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should welcome that criticism." Kendall noted that the school was formed out of segregationist ideals and mentioned that rather than hide it, the school should acknowledge this history. In fact, she was one of the only parents who had a well-thought-out plan for exactly how the school should handle discussing its racist history. She said, "I think they should have a statement ready for those kinds of things and I think they should invite people in to come see. You know, I think- I think that they should expect that kind of criticism because they're a small-town white school. And they should have a response ready." Kendall was quite concerned about the history of the school and the contemporary implications, especially since it is a 'small-town' (i.e., rural) school. While Kendall advocated for a transparent approach to discussions of the school's racist history and contemporary racial makeup, the majority of parents were more likely to agree with Randy Turner's take.

However, some parents reluctantly admitted that race and racism might still play a role in Colvin Academy's demographic makeup. Stacey Stewart alludes to this by saying,

"And I mean, I guess, you could say there is some racism there, but we- I mean, we don't have- there's nowhere in our guidelines that say 'We- we don't except this ethnicity or this religion or whatever' you know, it's basically if you pay the tuition and you want to come here and you want to abide by these rules that we've set up for our school then you're more than welcome, you know."

Though Stacey admits that racism might have something to do with the racial homogeneity of Colvin Academy, she ultimately puts the onus on families of color to

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change it- so long as they are willing to conform to 'their' community. Similarly, Evan Carter admitted,

> "I think initially, back in the seventies when it was formed, [race] was a big component of it. I don't- just don't see that anymore. Where it's- it's- golly, the number of [local professionals] who send their kids now who are anything but racist or- and so…I- that's- um, I don- I don't- I'm sure there are still a few families that probably have a race- that's why they don't send their kids there, but I don't- just don't see it"

While Evan admits that some of the parents who send their kids to Colvin Academy might have racist motivations, he does not 'see it.' This maps onto colorblind ideology (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018), which "…explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics". Many people argue that the United States has reached a post-racial society, or one in which racism is no longer an issue. Evan is drawing on these understandings to describe what he has experienced at Colvin Academy. He claims that though race might have been a 'component' of segregationist school choice in the '70's, this is no longer true because parents are no longer openly using racist explanations when choosing schools. By implying that class-privileged professionals should not be associated with such racist behavior, Evan is also drawing on the notion that only working-class whites are racist. Notably, class-privileged professionals are exactly the kinds of people who formed most segregationist academies in the first place (Andrews 2002, Fuquay 2002, Nevin and Bills 1976). While Stacey and Evan admit racism might be present among Colvin Academy parents, they ultimately dance around the issue, as

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many white people do when discussing race (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018, Lewis 2004, Lewis and Hagerman 2016). Furthermore, as Lewis (2004) argues, not every all-white setting is explicitly racial, but none are an accident. Certainly, this logic corresponds with the circumstances surrounding Colvin Academy.

In contrast, Beth Collins was the only parent I talked to who mentioned the implications of sending her daughter to an all-white, historically segregationist school in the present moment. She said,

> "Um, but when we first moved- when we were talking about moving up here, Jackson was four and I was like 'Can we not put him in [adjacent county's] public school? I mean, let's- let's be the white people that start'- you know, because people were saying 'You don't get the best education at [public school], it's just your only option.'…And we just couldn't do it. Even at four, in good faith, I could not send him to the public school."

Beth and her husband were strong believers in public education, but they ultimately decided that sending their children to the public school in their county would be too much of a 'sacrifice' for their family. They were soon proven right as the public school in their county was performing so poorly several of the district's schools received an F rating by the Mississippi Statewide Accountability System (led by the Mississippi Department of Education) and the district was soon taken over by the state of Mississippi after the governor declared the school was in a state of emergency. Beth was quite outspoken at other points in the interview about racial injustice, namely in her condemnation of the contemporary use of Confederate symbols. However, when I asked specifically about the

implications of choosing a segregationist academy, she said, "Uh, so I don't- I don't know that I really- it's not fair for me to have an opinion, because Colvin Academy for us was the best place that we could go." She also mentioned that her family was welcomed at Colvin Academy, despite their not being Christian, and surmised that black families would have a similar experience. Even Beth, as the most race-conscious parent I spoke with, became uncomfortable when asked to consider her place in the reproduction of racial inequality, insisting that if her (non-Christian) family was accepted at Colvin Academy, black families could be too.

While most parents did not explicitly acknowledge the racism behind segregated schooling or their role in the maintenance of these schools and persistent racial inequality, many pushed the belief in meritocracy as a way to reassure me that even if their choice was racially motivated, it would not actually do any harm. Rita Harris, a mom who used to teach in the Alabama public school system, shared with me that many of her students made it out of bad neighborhoods with no help from their parents because they were "hungry" for an education and success. She said, "…if you apply yourself, I truly believe you can make the best out of- yeah, you know. I've seen kids that just did so good and have graduated and have good jobs that their parents didn't help them too much, but they came and they wanted- they were hungry for it…" Similarly, Amy Cook told me,

> "You know, so um, probably weaknesses [of Colvin Academy] are just, you
> know, not having as big a selection as maybe a public school. You know, you get
> all these AP classes in a public school and, whether that really prepares you more,

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I don't know. Like I said, you know, I was fine. I really think it depends a lot on

the individual also."

While Rita expressed tenants of meritocratic ideology to minimize the sentiment that

their school choice might be harmful to children of color (because these children can still

'make it' if they work hard enough), Amy did the same to explain why she was not

considerably worried about Colvin Academy's academic weaknesses. In her interviews

with affluent children and parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds, Johnson (2015)

finds that virtually all participants simultaneously expressed a belief in the power of

wealth *and* meritocratic ideology. Though many American families understand the power

that can be afforded by wealth to choose the 'best' neighborhoods and therefore the 'best'

schools, they also tend to express a whole-hearted belief that hard work is the most

important component of success (Johnson 2015). This was true even when participants

were directly confronted with the role that private wealth had played in their own social

status (Johnson 2015). Importantly, colorblind and meritocratic ideology often work

together as whites often employ a belief in meritocracy to defend white privilege in

seemingly race-neutral terms (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018, Johnson 2015). Much like the

parents in Johnson's (2015) study, Colvin Academy parents utilized their wealth to select

the 'best' school for their children, which also happened to be the whitest option. They

then drew on meritocratic ideology to justify the use of their wealth to exclude children

of color *and* to justify sending their kids to a school with poor academics by reinforcing

the idea that individual merit is what truly matters for educational success. In this way,

CA parents can use the same colorblind, meritocratic logic to explain away the fact that

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they chose a school with admittedly unsatisfactory academics to put their white children in a white school, all while framing it as a matter that had nothing to do with race.

How Parents want their Kids to Understand Race, Schooling, and Inequality

Given the local article accusing Colvin Academy of racism and the uproar it had caused among many members of the community, I asked parents if and to what extent they had discussed these issues with their children. Brandon Stewart explained,

> "I mean, I think that they are aware, especially my oldest one would be aware of the distractions- the back and forth between public and private schools. Um, the funny thing is, they feel like that arguing is more between parents and not between students. You know, and so, they think it's kinda funny that it's just a competitiveness between parents and to some extent it's not much different than Ole Miss v. Mississippi State or whatever, you know. It's- it's almost like a rivalry, and the fans get into it more than the actual players do."

Brandon was amused that his kids think about the inequalities between schools like a sports rivalry. While it may ease tensions in his own household, this understanding of inequality ultimately ignores the historical and contemporary oppression of children of color by Colvin Academy, the state of Mississippi, and the United States as a whole. Of course, kids do not always understand things the way their parents want them to.

Often, parents' justifications for choosing Colvin Academy informed how their children thought about themselves and their public-school counterparts, even when parents did not intend for this to happen. When Jaclyn Green was telling me how she explained their choice to her son, she said,

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"We try very, very hard to not make any judgement calls- you know, what we say

is, 'We made this decision because it was best for our family. Here's why we like

your school'. Um, of course, sometimes that kind of goes south because you say

something like 'One of the reasons that we like your school, is that you pray at

school and you have Bible stories at school' which then immediately he's going,

'You mean Jackson doesn't pray?'. No, no, no, no, no, buddy. (Laughs)."

Though Jaclyn did not explicitly tell her son that public school kids do not pray, it is clear

that her explanations made an impact on her son, who was immediately concerned that

his friend may not pray like he does because he attends public school. Brandon and

Jaclyn's attempts at discussing inequality did little to address the institutional

discrimination that children of color face within and between schools, but this was to be

expected of parents working under a colorblind framework. As Bonilla-Silva (2018: 9)

writes, "If the ultimate goal of the dominant race is to defend its collective interests, it

should surprise no one that this group develops rationalizations to account for the status

of the various races." Of course, another way for a group to 'defend its collective

interests' is to remain silent on issues of injustice. Indeed, the most common way parents

approached these difficult topics with their children was by refusing to discuss them at

all.

Sophia Hall relayed to me how disheartened she had felt when she read the article

and learned that "…people still throw the stone of racism around." I asked if she had

discussed these feelings with her son, Tate, and she said,

"…we really didn't discuss it much as a family just because it's still nice to- even as a seventh-grader, kinda think that you know, you don't have to worry about those type of issues quite yet. He- he's aware of- of them, but um, I didn't figure it would do any good. It's not building anyone up, so. We really did not discuss it as a family."

Like Sophia, many parents expressed that their children were too young to discuss 'those types of issues', meaning race, racism, and inequality. While Sophia was certainly not the only parent who expressed this sentiment, it is notable that her son was in *seventh grade* at the time of this interview. Similarly, Julia Cooper told me that she did not discuss these types of issues with her children. She explained, "…I pretty much try to be an ostrich myself and just ignore every single thing that's going on." Certainly, children of color are not able to avoid these uncomfortable realities in the same way that white children are, and Sophia's account simply reinforces the idea that white children are more 'innocent' and/or remain 'innocent' for longer than children of color (e.g., Ferguson 2003, Roberts 1997, 2002, Woodhouse 2008). Further, Julia's insistence that she does not talk about such things with her children because she herself ignores them demonstrates the shield provided by white privilege well into adulthood.

Unlike most of the parents interviewed, Kendall Bennett and Beth Collins were outspoken about racial inequality throughout our time together. I asked Kendall if she ever discussed politics with her children and she said, "I mean, I like having those conversations with them and I don't really care if they agree with me or not. I just want them to think critically." However, despite Kendall's desire for her children to think

critically about the world around them and her own critical stance of Colvin Academy, she could not think of a time in which she had engaged in a meaningful discussion with them about their school. As mentioned previously, Beth was also vocal about her stance on race and racism but did not 'have an opinion' on her own role in supporting a segregationist academy. Like Kendall, Beth had not discussed the article or the school's reputation with her daughter even though they often talked about current events and inequality as a family. Beth and Kendall illustrate perfectly the pervasiveness of colorblind ideology and white privilege. Though they were aware of and outspoken about inequality in many ways and often involved their children in these discussions, they failed to engage critically with the role their school choice plays in the maintenance of white supremacy.

Colvin Academy parents overwhelmingly agreed that academics are one of the school's biggest weaknesses. They in turn pointed to the educational environment offered by CA to justify their school choice, specifically an environment in which Protestant Christian values are promoted and incorporated into the daily curriculum. They also overwhelmingly agreed that they enjoy having direct access to teachers and administrators as they find it important to be able to intervene with the education their children are receiving. It is clear from parent interviews that Colvin Academy offers a conservative education sprinkled with Bible stories and 'traditional' values. Notably, these aspects, which were found attractive by nearly every parent I spoke to, are the same ones that the school was founded on (e.g., Nevin and Bills 1976).

What does a Segregated Schooling Context mean for Students?

Though parents today are much less likely to point explicitly to race when discussing their school choice, the racial context of childhood set up by Colvin Academy parents was constructed around deeply racialized understandings of families, schools, sports, etc. So, what does this (segregated) context of childhood actually mean for the kids? In this section, I expand more on the kids' experiences growing up in this context using their voices.

Growing up in Rural Mississippi

Racial socialization scholar Margaret Hagerman (2018:20) writes, "A racial context of childhood is the social environment surrounding a child that shapes how that child makes sense of race…In this way, the choices their parents make about how to set up the racial context in the first place influence, though do not determine, the messages kids receive, interpret, and produce in everyday life." Though scholars have set out to study how white kids come to understand racism, their racial identity, and their position within racial hierarchies (see: Hagerman 2010, 2014, 2016, 2018, Lewis 2003, Perry 2002), these studies have been centered on kids growing up in urban and suburban communities. This present study adds to current literature by examining how white kids growing up in the rural South understand themselves as racial subjects and their place in a racialized social system. Of course, the racial context in which these kids live is also shaped by their school, which provides a segregated schooling environment. Overall, most of the kids I interviewed have enjoyed experiencing childhood in this context.

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To build rapport early in the interview, I asked the kids what they thought about growing up in Mississippi. Tate Hall said, "I really don't know if there's anything I don't like about it. Um, but I like kinda like [the] smaller town feeling, you don't have like big cities like New York." Much like Tate, most of the kids drew on understandings of rurality, like the 'small town feeling' (see: Bell 2007, Cramer 2016, Halfacree 2005), to explain why they like where they live. Similarly, Matt Spencer said, "I like [Mississippi]. I like the- I'm not super big on you know, the camouflage, the hunting kinda stuff like that but I love like, this right here [gesturing towards his family's large, secluded property]. The outdoors and how you can really be connected to nature…" Even Matt, who does not identify with the 'culture' typically associated with rurality (e.g., Bell 2007, Cramer 2016, Halfacree 2005), appreciates growing up in Mississippi because he perceives it to be a place in which one can be more 'connected' to nature.

The growing body of scholarship on rural education suggests that high-achieving class-privileged students in rural communities tend to leave to seek out 'better' educational and occupational opportunities in urban and suburban areas, resulting in what many scholars refer to as the 'rural brain drain' (Carr and Kefalas 2009, Byun et al. 2012, Irvin et al. 2011, Meece et al. 2013, Sherman and Sage 2011).

When I asked Jacey King if she would stay in Mississippi when she grows up, she said, "I want to. It just like, depends- like, if I couldn't get a job here, I obviously couldn't live here, but if I find a job in Mississippi, then I'd love to live here as long as I could." Like Jacey, many of the kids I interviewed did typically indicate that they would one day need to move for work or school, though they also expressed a strong desire to

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come back. For instance, Brittany Styles told me that in the event she has to move, she "would definitely come back to visit a lot." When asked what kinds of people stay in Mississippi and what kind of people leave, Jameson Howard told me,

> "I feel like some people, it really depends on how you were raised. Like, I was raised hunting and fishing and being outside all the time so and used to the- used to the heat of the weather and I definitely think I would stay but some people are more like, they're- they're not really- they're like, going to water parks and trampoline parks and stuff like that. Mississippi really doesn't have that and I'm sure they'd move- move where the parks and spots like that would be so they could have those things when they wanted to go."

Jameson's assertion that only people who grow up in rural spaces will like living in them is reminiscent of the understanding of rural as 'lacking' in some respects (e.g., Bell 2007). Specifically, rural has been constructed, both in academia and mainstream society, as "…a relative being to the urban, and as a subordinate relative being…" (Bell 2007: 407). Many of the kids drew upon similar understandings, calling their town 'boring' and stating that there is just 'not much to do'. However, they did not seem to position rural as inherently subordinate as they asserted that they still love Mississippi and have enjoyed growing up here.

Of course, the kids were able to identify drawbacks of living in Mississippi, most noting the stereotyping they have experienced as a result of where they live. When I asked Melinda King what she dislikes about living in Mississippi, she responded, laughing, "Mississippi- nobody likes Mississippi. I don't know understand why. We get

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called the land mass in between Louisiana and Alabama." While she could not pinpoint the reasoning, Melinda knew that people have negative perceptions of Mississippi, emphasized by the way the state is discussed in the media (i.e., as a 'land mass'). Matt Spencer spoke to this as well, explaining, "Um, I mean, of course like anywhere, you have the racists and the sexists and the everybody else but that's- that's in everywhere. People will say that that's only in Mississippi or it's stronger in Mississippi." Matt acknowledges that there are certainly racists and sexists in Mississippi, but it bothers him that people assume that his home state is the hub of these ideas. Research demonstrates that there are popular assumptions about people who live in rural and/or Southern areas, particularly that they are more likely to reproduce 'backwards' ideas such as racism, sexism, and homophobia (e.g., Ashwood 2018, Bell 1997, Hartigan 2013, Hubbs 2014, Jarosz and Lawson 2002, Rushing 2017, Shirley 2010, Winders 2003, Wray 2006). The kids in this study were well aware of these assumptions, and some kids even bought into them.

During a discussion about whether or not racism is still a problem in America, James Cook stated, "I think so. Not as much in the Northern states but maybe in the Southern states." James then explained that there were likely more racists in the South than the North, "Because the South had a bunch of slaves and they believed in slavery, but the North didn't." Though James insisted he had never witnessed racism before, he understood the South as inherently more racist than the North due to the historical legacy of slavery. After asking Jacey King a similar question, she responded,

"I think it's more-so a problem in the South than like, in the North I don't really think it's a huge issue. And like, in the- in the West or anything it's not that big of a deal but in the South, you still have those like, older Southern people who just are completely against black people cause that's kind of how they were raised."

Like James, Jacey posits the South as a place that has more racist people because more 'original' racists lived here and, in turn, raised their children to be racist as well. Though James and Jacey both drew connections between the racist legacy of Southern history and their belief that the South has more racist people today than other regions, they still posited racism as an individual-level problem, asserting that this is just the way that older Southern generations 'were raised.' In this way, drawing on these connections was used to explain away claims of contemporary racism rather than to give them legitimacy. Additionally, this use of history does not include a critical view of their own school, which was certainly formed by many of these 'older Southern people.' The fact that some of these kids bought into the stereotypes of people in rural and Southern areas as inherently more racist than others demonstrates just how pervasive these ideas are, especially given that they have grown up in these areas and that most insisted they had never witnessed racism here. Though they did not identify with what they perceive to be 'true' racists (i.e., 'old' people), these stereotypes still informed how the kids in this study thought of themselves and their classmates as racial subjects.

When I asked Griffin Kennedy how race affects his life, he said:

Griffin: Too much issues with [race]. I mean, not just the racists, it's the liberals that get all this in their head. They're making [race and racism] a huge epidemic instead of looking at what is actually happening in the world.

Interviewer: So, do you think people- like you said liberals, do you think they like, over-exaggerate racism as an issue?

Griffin: They over-exaggerate a lot.

Interviewer: Why do you think they do that?

Griffin: To get people on their side. They're making us seem like we're Nazis, racists, fascists, all this and that. Just real over-exaggerating just to make us look awful and get people on their side.

Interviewer: When you say us, do you mean like, Southerners or Republicans or Southern Republicans?

Griffin: Both.

Griffin is invoking the 'minimization of racism' frame of colorblind ideology to explain that racism is not truly as big of a problem as 'liberals' make it out to be. Bonilla-Silva (2018: 74) notes that colorblind racism works to "…form an impregnable yet elastic wall that barricades whites from the United States' racial reality." Similarly, Mueller (2017: 234) writes, "As previous generations who performed everyday racism while maintaining their personal and corporate morality, whites today utilize ways of knowing that mystify the racial mechanisms of their era, in a society perpetually organized around preserving white power and privilege." Finally, Lewis (2004) asserts that the power whites hold in the racialized social structure of the U.S. (see: Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2018) often allows

them to disengage with racial inequality and shields them from recognizing whiteness as a meaningful part of their identity. She argues that studying whites as a group is thus difficult, "…because of individual whites' inability to talk coherently about their racial identity and their sometimes denial of having any identification with white as a collective reality" (Lewis 2004: 626). As such, Griffin's perception of how race affects him complicates understandings of how white privilege and colorblind ideology work, specifically that whites are able to 'escape' issues of race, racism, and white identity, so long as they are able to 'maneuver' through epistemologies of ignorance (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018, Lewis 2004, Mueller 2017).

Griffin and other Colvin Academy kids certainly engaged in the epistemological 'maneuvering' outlined by Mueller (2017), but the 'impregnable wall' that this would typically afford whites is not available to them in the same way. The 'context of childhood' these children are growing up in, or one that is rural and Southern, directly informs and is informed by their whiteness, creating a complex experience in which they are confronted with accusations of racism frequently enough that it is a meaningful part of their racial identity. This finding maps onto the work of McDermott (2006), who argues that in some contexts, whiteness can be perceived to be a burden rather than a privilege. It is certainly important to note that while Griffin finds these accusations salient to his experience, he does not in fact think of himself as racist. Instead, he asserts that liberals exaggerate instances of racism to further a political agenda. Notably, such projection is a common 'rhetorical tool' of colorblind ideology (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018). The impact of accusations of racism on these kids' lived experiences is further

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exacerbated by the school environment their parents have chosen for them as part of their 'racial context of childhood.'

Growing up in a Segregationist Academy

As discussed previously, the parents in this study were aware that Colvin Academy has a reputation as racist and often discussed this openly with me in regard to the controversial article which called into question the school's contemporary all-white student population. I asked each parent if their kids had heard about this article or picked up on the fact that people thought they were racist, and they all assured me that their kids were in their "own little world" and did not pay attention to such issues. Though none of the kids brought up or knew about the controversial article, they were in fact aware that their school did not have a good reputation in their community. Matt Spencer explained,

> "Like, you know, typically with kids our age, the first thing you ask is, 'Oh, what church do you go to? What school do you go to?' and as soon as they hear [Colvin Academy], it's just like, it's an instant turn off. And like, that's kinda sad because the same thing, 'Well, how many years did you put in at CA?' 'Oh, well, none'. Okay, so you're just looking at it from the outside in, you know what I'm saying?"

Matt's comment offers insight into the ways in which the lived experiences of these kids are informed by the school they go to and local perceptions of that school. He is clearly frustrated with the stigma attached to attending a segregationist academy and the difficulty this can cause when meeting new people, especially people who do not have personal experiences with his school or schools like it.

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Similarly, when discussing the racial homogeneity of his school, Dave Mckinally said, "People will get mad at people and my family for being involved with Colvin Academy cause they just- they think that we're not- that we don't um, they think that we're racist pretty much." Dave was uncomfortable when we got to this point of the interview and as we continued, he grew more and more agitated. He went on to say,

> "I think it's wrong to get upset at the children cause you know, we didn't choose
> where to go to school. I mean, I like Colvin Academy but there are ups and downs
> at Colvin Academy and there are ups and downs at the public school. I'd love to
> try a year there. I think that'd be fun. But um, I just think that it's ridiculous that
> that's- that's just ridiculous. I don't think that if you go to Colvin Academy,
> you're racist cause I know that we're not."

Dave's frustrations mirror those of most of the kids in this study as the stigma attached to Colvin Academy is connected not only to the parents who chose the school but also to the kids who go there. I asked Dave if he had ever talked to his family about this stigma and he shared that when he has, they typically reiterate that he should not be ashamed of where he goes to school. Further, even though he knows people think he's racist, he does not see himself or his family that way.

Notably, though boys and girls both felt strongly about how Mississippi, the South, and rural areas are perceived, boys were much more vocal about the accusations of racism that pertained specifically to Colvin Academy. Research on rural masculinities has shown that white, working-class men in particular are disproportionately blamed for the 'backwards' ideas associated with rurality (e.g., Hubbs 2014). Of course, the boys in this

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study do not come from working-class families, and research on white class-privileged boys and men in rural areas is limited. So, while it is certainly possible that CA boys had a more personal connection to such accusations than the girls, or were simply more likely to vocalize their opposition to these accusations, there was not enough data in this study to make conclusive claims about these apparent gender and class distinctions.

How CA Kids Explain the Racial Makeup of their School

Colvin Academy kids knew that people think their school is racist, but it is just as important to understand what *they* thought about their school. To begin exploring this, I asked the kids what they knew about the history of Colvin Academy and if they thought there was a reason that most of their classmates are white. When asked if they ever discuss the history of their school in class, most kids quickly informed me that they did not. Ellie McCarthy told me, "The only time we [talked about Colvin Academy's history] was because we were in like, the cheer room and we found old cheer uniforms in there. That was like, the only time we did". As demonstrated by Ellie's comment, the discussions the kids could remember about Colvin Academy's history typically centered around old sports victories, omitting the school's racist beginnings in favor of a more flattering historical portrait. Similarly, Graham Wall explained, "Well, I know they talk about when the school was built- when like, when they added extra things to it and like, all I know is that they talk about the past times. Or like championships that the team's won". Clearly, Colvin Academy does not make much of an effort to educate students about its past. Indeed, it stays silent about these realities. This is unsurprising given the lack of formal attention paid to the school's history on its website or in its handbook, as

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discussed earlier. However, this absence of vital information likely only contributes to the frustration CA kids feel when someone calls them, their family, or their school racist.

Though the school remained silent on these issues, some kids did have a vague, partial understanding of how and why the school was formed. When I asked Anthony Scott why his school is, as he put it, "not that diverse", he said, "Um, I think it's historically because the school was founded by like, parents of kids who didn't want to go to the public school really and that's why. I think that's why it's not that diverse. At least, other kids feel like they wouldn't really fit in here as well". Anthony acknowledges that the founding parents of Colvin Academy wanted to get their kids out of the public school, but he does not seem to know exactly why, though we know it was to provide a segregated education to white, middle-class kids (Andrews 2002, Fuquay 2002, Munford 1973, Nevin and Bills 1976). It is important to note that he also makes an association between the public school and 'diverse' people, i.e., people of color.

When I asked Anthony why he thinks parents choose Colvin Academy in the contemporary climate, he said, "Um, I think they send their kids here like, they think it's safer than the public schools. Especially like um, some of the earlier- or early years of school, the public schools here aren't considered to be as good." Anthony is drawing on the same racialized ideas about safety and what constitutes a 'good' school that many of the CA parents I interviewed did. Though much research has been done on what parents consider to be a 'good' school (e.g., Holmes 2002, Johnson 2015, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Saporito and Lareau 1999), research on how this 'knowledge' is transferred to their children is lacking. Anthony's assertion that the local public school has a poor reputation

compared to CA is also notable as it stands in direct contrast to what most of the parents told me, which is discussed in more detail below.

In contrast, Dave Mckinally had a more accurate understanding of why the school was formed, though he still denied that racism was an underlying factor. He said,

"…a long time ago private schools were uh, you know, back when black people didn't have the same rights as us, we had more opportunities and we would end up making more money because we had those opportunities and we were the ones that could send kids to uh, private schools. And so, now people maybe see that as blacks aren't welcome".

Trying to make sense of Dave's train of thought, I asked if he meant that maybe private schools used to be racist but are not now and he continued,

"I- I don't think it- I don't think it ever was [racist] but I think at the time the private schools as a whole like, being formed in other places were maybe- were not in any way like that but um, people would assume that that's like that because white people with more opportunities because of their rights would get more- would uh, be able to uh, send their kids to that school so it was kinda like a white school and a black school".

Though Dave recognized that whites had 'more rights' and thus more opportunities and wealth, he quickly denied that parents who formed Colvin Academy had racist intentions, though he did concede that the school's history might make people think that. Hagerman (2018) found that kids who grew up in a colorblind context did not know much about the historical implications of racism in the United States, much less the ways in which this

history continues to shape the life chances of individuals. Despite being consistently confronted with accusations of racism, Colvin Academy kids were similarly uninformed about the true history of their school. This is important as Dave, like most CA kids I talked to, struggled to make connections between the school's racist history and its contemporary makeup and reputation because he did not perceive this history to be racist or racially motivated in the first place.

To explain why the school is still populated by mostly white kids, Dave pointed to its reputation as racist, stating, "I just think the people at the public school that haven't- that don't know much about the private school would just assume that it's still the way that it's always kinda been and they would just- kinda old-fashioned thinking. Thinking that private schools are for whites". In this comment, Dave essentially flipped the script and blamed those who think the school is racist as the ones who are engaging in racist, 'old-fashioned thinking', a common tenant of colorblind ideology (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018). He is also blaming the all-white makeup of Colvin Academy on the choices of people of color. It is important to note that Anthony and Dave were some of the only kids who were able to make connections between the school's past and its contemporary circumstances, and even they had distorted and incomplete understandings of what actually happened in the past. Dave also spoke to a sentiment shared by many parents, or that black families are ultimately responsible for integrating Colvin Academy. However, when I asked if he thought just anyone could send their kid to his school he said,

> "Um, I think that if you wanted to, you definitely could but I don't think like, you
>
> know, if you would want to send your kids to Colvin Academy, then you're

willing to work for it, you're willing to you know, have a- sustain a good job to make the money to send your kids to Colvin Academy. And I don't think that people that you know, don't work or maybe uh, live on welfare checks and stuff, I don't think they would want to send kids to Colvin Academy anyway."

Like earlier comments which have put the onus on black parents to 'fix' the racial homogeneity of Colvin Academy, Dave's argument suggests that black parents simply do not wish to work hard enough to afford the tuition, especially if they can 'live on welfare'. Though Dave never explicitly said that he is referring to black parents and families, racist and sexist perceptions of welfare recipients are embedded in policy and the public consciousness (e.g., Albiston and Nielsen 1994, Bonilla-Silva 2018, Roberts 1997, 2002, Solinger 2005, Williams 1995). Further, Dave had already expressed a connection between the public school and people of color, making it even more clear that he is in fact referring to black parents.

Jacey King echoed this sentiment, stating,

"Well, I know some of the race thing is like, well, I- like I've heard from people at Colvin High School, they're like- these black people, they're like, 'I don't want to go to Colvin Academy cause it's like, racist' but I'm like, well if you're not coming then it's gonna make us even more racist cause we have only white people. And also, in town, a lot of the um, more poor people in town are black and a lot of the more wealthy people in town are white so it doesn't really help with how many black people we have at our school".

Jacey not only blames the 'racist' nature of Colvin Academy on the black people that refuse to come there, but she also points to the town's racial wealth gap (e.g., Oliver and Shapiro 1995) to explain why many black families cannot choose CA in the first place. Though she drew on knowledge about the racial inequalities in town, she later spoke in more depth about the racial wealth gap, explaining,

> "I think it's cause a lot of [black people] are raised that way so it like, started like, a long time ago and they were all so- they were raised that way. I've heard stories about kids at um, [public elementary school] that are like, 'When I grow up I'm not gonna work, I'm just gonna wait for my check like my mom does' so I'm like, 'Well, that's not really helping you get anywhere in life'".

Jacey's and Dave's explanations of racial inequality are rooted in myths about the black community and the 'culture of poverty', or the belief that black families are pathological and that black parents reproduce a culture of dependence on government services (see: Albiston and Nielsen 1994, Alexander 2012, Bonilla-Silva 2018, Edin and Nelson 2014, Holmes 2002, Oliver and Shapiro 2006, Roberts 1997, 2002, Solinger 2005, Williams 1995, Wilson 1987). In this way, they made sense of the contemporary racial makeup of their school by employing a belief in meritocracy (e.g., Johnson 2015) and colorblind ideology (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018) to explain and justify the material inequality that exists between the black and white communities in town. This shifts the blame from the segregationist history and intentions of Colvin Academy to local black families by positing that if they simply worked hard enough, they too could choose this school. It is important to note that Dave, Jacey, and many other participants switched back and forth

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between 'typical' colorblind language and explicitly racist assertions. However, the two are not mutually exclusive, and Bonilla-Silva (2018: xiv) argues that "…ideologies have different tones of expression and colorblind racism is no different." He further asserts that, at times, whites "…feel entitled to vent their resentment in a relatively straightforward manner" (Bonilla-Silva 2018: 95). This back and forth could also be characterized as 'dog whistle politics,' or the "coded talk" that often references race while maintaining the façade of colorblindness (Haney-López 2015: 4). So, even though not everything participants said was technically 'colorblind,' this ideology clearly informed how they made sense of the world around them, even if it seems that they strayed from it at times.

As mentioned earlier, most kids did not even know enough about the school's history to be able to make connections to contemporary inequality. Without such tools, many kids could not identify why their school is all-white. In fact, some kids posited that Colvin Academy's all-white makeup did not have significant meaning at all. Brittney Styles said, "I guess it's just that many people just wanted to go to Colvin Academy. Cause there are some black people there that they just- they wanted to go there so they did. And I don't know, I guess that's it". Brittney explained to me that 'it is what it is' and used the school's token minority students to drive home her point. Here, Brittney is invoking the 'naturalization' frame of colorblind racial ideology (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018). Under colorblind ideology, "The word 'natural' or the phrase 'that's the way it is' is often interjected to normalize events or actions that could otherwise be interpreted as racially motivated (residential segregation) or racist (preferences for whites as friends and

partners)" (Bonilla-Silva 2018: 64). This frame also supports the idea that all races 'self-segregate' (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018) and that black parents choose black schools in the same way that white parents choose white schools. However, research shows that black parents much prefer racially diverse schools (Saporito and Lareau 1999) and that the attendance of predominantly black schools by black students is a function of structural inequality (i.e., the racial wealth gap) rather than individual choice (e.g., Johnson 2015, Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Brittney's use of this ideological framework was likely not intentional or calculated, but it does demonstrate the ways in which kids reproduce colorblind ideology to discuss the world around them (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018, Hagerman 2014, 2016, 2018, Mueller 2017).

Brittney was only one of many participants (including parents) who used Colvin Academy's token minority students to minimize the significance of going to a predominantly white school. This is another tactic of colorblind ideology in which people claim to have black friends or distant relatives in order to dissuade accusations of racism (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018). Of course, Colvin Academy's student population is still over 98% white, making it difficult to claim that the school has successfully detached itself from its racist history. Research on neighborhood racial composition and white flight has shown that most whites perceive a neighborhood to be 'too diverse' when the black population reaches between 5% and 20% (Card et al. 2007). We also know that white parents tend to choose white schools for their children (Dougherty et al. 2009, Holmes 2002, Johnson 2015, Saporito and Lareau 1999) and that one of the most prevalent reasons for white flight into private academies during formal desegregation (1954-1976)

was the proportion of black students in the school and county (Andrews 2002; Cready and Fossett 1998; Munford 1973; Reece and O'Connell 2015). So, though Colvin Academy has a few minority students, their presence does not dissolve the school of its role in the reproduction of inequality as they still make up less than 2% of the student body (NCES1 2016).

Further, when I asked about the racial breakdown of the adults who work at the school, most kids told me that they, too, were all white. I often had to specifically ask about the few adults of color who were there as custodial and cafeteria workers. While discussing this with Alicia Spencer, she remembered that these workers at Colvin Academy are typically people of color. I asked how she felt about that, hoping Alicia would think more about why the only people of color who work at her school hold these positions, but she simply responded that they are "still nice". Buchanan and Settles (2018:5) argue that invisibility in the workplace, or the "…state or condition where an individual is not fully recognized and valued", is rooted in power, social hierarchies, and social status and that marginalized individuals are often rendered invisible in their occupational endeavors. Given this combined with the controlling images of black women circulated through popular discourse (e.g., Collins 2006, 2015, Roberts 1997) and the fact that black women tend to work these kinds of jobs in the town more generally, it is likely that the reason why kids like Alicia had not put much thought into the segregated division of labor at Colvin Academy is because they are familiar with ideas about people of color, and more specifically women of color, working in service positions. However, there was one notable exception to this general rule.

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When discussing the racially segregated division of labor at her school and why she thinks people of color are more likely to work in the cafeteria or as custodial workers, Ava Gaines said,

> "Um, I think- I know this is weird but um, I still think from when the time that like, African Americans were like slaves and stuff, for some reason I still think that's like, the reason. I know they're not slaves at all and they're still thought as higher people, but I don't know, it just kinda makes me think like, like um, that may be why, but I know it's not."

Ava was the only kid I talked to that *rejected* colorblind ideology (see: Hagerman 2014, 2016, 2018), and though it was difficult, tried to navigate her place as a white person in a racialized social system (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018, Lewis 2004). Even though Ava did not exhibit a working understanding of the school's history, we can see that she demonstrates immense agency, going against everything represented by her context of childhood (e.g., Hagerman 2018), to try and explain its current racial makeup. As such, Ava's comments further support Hagerman's (2016: 69) argument that though the racial context of childhood certainly influences how children form ideas about race, it "…does not preclude the possibility of children participating in cultural refinement and change of the ideologies that support this context."

For the most part, Colvin Academy kids know their school is predominantly white and that this has implications for how the school and its students are perceived in the larger community. Importantly, not one child could accurately tell me what this reputation stems from as very few of them knew even basic information about the

school's founding. The lack of knowledge about the school's history simply increased confusion and frustration for many of the kids, as they know people often make negative assumptions about them, but they do not know why. This lack of knowledge also contributed to a general confusion about the contemporary makeup of the school as well, which many kids explained away using colorblind tactics (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018) and meritocratic ideology (e.g., Johnson 2015) as either the result of 'natural' choices or the lack of effort on the part of black families to work hard enough to integrate the school. To continue to get at how the kids think of themselves and others due to their 'racial context of childhood' (e.g., Hagerman 2014, 2018), especially given the poor reputation Colvin Academy has in the community, I asked many of them why they thought their parents chose this school for them.

Colvin Academy vs. the Public School

Notably, though Colvin Academy parents almost universally identified the school's academics as its biggest weakness, the kids I talked to held much more positive views of their educational environment. For example, Tate Hall said,

"It's like a smaller school, you know, you get to like, know all the teachers and know all your friends, you know. Like, older students and younger students, you kinda just know everybody and you're able to like, focus more on certain things. Like, if you really wanna learn something, you have a teacher or friends, you'll be able to work on it together and you won't like, not know half the other people in your classes".

As Tate mentions, the school's relatively small size means that Colvin Academy students have access to more of their teachers' time and attention, giving them more access to individual educational resources than kids at the local public school. When asked if kids at different schools receive the same kind of education, Melinda King articulated this point even further, stating,

"I believe so, but in some places it's harder to teach cause uh, [one of our teachers] was talking about this in class today… Basically, he said that we get taught the same at both but it's harder to teach a bigger class than it is a smaller class cause when you're in a bigger class you can't like, stop every once in a while, for everyone that has like, questions or isn't understanding. But at a private school when you have like, eight people in a classroom at a time, you can stop and like, help everyone. I feel like that's really the only difference in our education".

Like Tate and Melinda, Colvin Academy kids typically viewed their school as 'better' than the local public school because they have more access to one-on-one help from teachers. As detailed above, this was a major pull factor for most of the parents I interviewed who found it important to be able to intervene with their child's education (see also: Hagerman 2018, Johnson 2015, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Oakes 2005, Posey-Maddox 2014) despite their general belief that Colvin Academy's academics need major improvement.

Dave Mckinally expressed a similar understanding, stating that his school has a lot of "choices and opportunities" that the public school does not have. Just as important

as the kids' interpretations of their school environment is their understandings of why they get these resources and other kids do not (see: Bettie 2013, Calarco 2011, Demerath 2009, Hagerman 2018, Johnson 2015, Lewis 2001, 2003, Lewis and Diamond 2015, Oakes 2005, Perry 2002). Therefore, I asked Dave how he would respond if someone were to say that this is unfair, and he said,

> "Well, if anyone said it's unfair- that maybe we have any advantage over the public school, it's- we're paying to go. You- you have to pay to go to Colvin Academy, so you know, there's that. That's a big uh, influence on it. That, you know, at private school- you know, at public school if it's- if you're not paying to go to the public school, you can't expect as much as a school as you might pay to go to".

Dave was visibly annoyed by this rhetorical accusation and quickly justified his unequal access to resources by asserting that Colvin Academy kids simply get what their parents pay for. It is important to remember that earlier in the interview, he argued that anyone could afford Colvin Academy if they really wanted to but that many public-school families were simply more interested in 'living off' welfare. Similarly, Jameson Howard asserted that kids at Colvin Academy value their education more and work harder because they have to pay for it.

Of course, some kids used their belief in meritocracy to minimize rather than explain away educational inequality. For example, Matt Spencer explained,

> "So, if you're at the public school and you're in a class and you know, there's forty people in there, then you can- I mean, it- if it's something you really want,

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you can find time. Make time, you know, get with that teacher, email them, say, 'Can we go sit down somewhere and I- I really want to understand this material better'. I think at Colvin Academy you might be put at an advantage to kinda already have that but at the same time, you don't really [have an advantage] because like I said, there are still people that just get in there and don't care. And so, to say that we're at an advantage and that it's not fair, I think really isn't true because it- like I said, you work for it. So, if you're working for it, then how is it not fair? Cause it's something you're putting into it".

Matt asserts that while small class sizes may provide some advantage, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to do what they can with the resources they have. Further, he claims that the hard work Colvin Academy kids put into their education negates the unfair and unearned advantages they started with. This maps directly onto the work of Johnson (2015), who found that though most parents and children interviewed drew attention to the power of wealth, they also expressed a whole-hearted belief in the American Dream, even when this contradiction was directly challenged. Further, research has also shown that ideas about what constitute a 'good' school are socially constructed (Dougherty et al. 2009, Hagerman 2018, Holmes 2002, Johnson 2015) and many Colvin Academy kids drew on the same ideas as their parents about what makes a school 'good'. What Colvin Academy kids thought about the inequalities between their school and the local public school was certainly important, but the way they view themselves as opposed to public school kids was even more telling.

Much like their parents, several kids noted that their school was 'safer' than the public school. Blaire Simmons explained to me that since moving from the public school to Colvin Academy, she will no longer have to worry about getting involved with "the wrong people", which she characterized as those who do drugs. Similarly, Anthony Scott offered an explanation for the perceived prevalence of public-school fights, stating, "…because um, a lot of people at public school are you know, lower income and what not because they don't- they can't afford to go here. So, also, I think that the rules are less strict, so you can get into fights more easily". Similarly, Griffin Kennedy pointed to the large presence of 'latchey kids,' a pejorative term for children of working-class or single parents who are often left alone, at the public school when discussing how they are different from Colvin Academy students. He said, "Is latchkey a correct word to use? Cause like, there's kids that are just latchkey kids that do stupid stuff and there are some that are pretty good. Like, [at the public middle school], those kids are pretty good and Colvin High School, some of them are good. It's just half and half". Like the parents I talked to, Anthony and Griffin are drawing on understandings of what constitutes a 'good' family to explain what they perceive as behavioral problems found at the local public school. Unfortunately, these false understandings of which families are 'good' versus 'bad' are not only racist, sexist, and classist, but have been used to justify the disenfranchisement of economically marginalized families and/or families of color throughout U.S. history (see: Alexander 2012, Coontz et al. 2008, Coontz 2016, Fetner 2011, Raleigh 2018, Roberts 1997, 2002, Solinger 2005). Notably, Colvin Academy kids often reinforced these ideas by drawing on their religious identity.

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Religious Socialization and Comprehensive Racial Learning

In contrast to dominant understandings of socialization as an 'uninterrupted process' (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018), Hagerman (2014, 2016, 2018) has documented the agency that kids exhibit when either reproducing, reworking, or rejecting colorblind ideology. In a fascinating demonstration of how this might play out in a place like rural Mississippi, Colvin Academy kids often incorporated religion into their reiterations of colorblind ideology. By this, I mean that they often navigated discussions of race and, more specifically, whiteness using the framework provided them by an upbringing and school environment centered on Protestant Christian beliefs and practices. For example, I asked Erica Cook what race she is, and she told me without hesitation that she is white. When I asked *how* she knows that, she thought for a moment and then said, "Um, I mean, I ca- I came from Adam and Eve and Jesus and they're white. And God, so. I guess, since I'm white. (Laughs)."

Though Erica was the only kid to explicitly implement this belief, it is incredibly important that even though she did not know anything about Colvin Academy's segregationist history, she is drawing on an argument used by the very segregationists who founded her school to explain her racial identity in a contemporary context. It is also critical to note here that the association of Christ with white skin is a direct product of colonization and white violence (Blum and Harvey 2012). As Blum and Harvey (2012: 10-11) write, "Faith in and depictions of this new 'Nordic' Christ symbolized white Americas' righteousness- and self-righteousness- as they took control of foreign peoples, lynched black men, and barred or discriminated against immigrants."

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These religious arguments were central not only for how the kids understand themselves as racial subjects, but also for how they view others. Many kids, in line with their parents, pointed to the religious 'freedom' they have to describe how their school is different from the local public school. Matt Spencer explained,

> "So, with it being a private school, we can you know, discuss what we want. We don't have to worry about the regulations or, 'I can talk about this and get fired' or you know, the- that's nice. And that's probably one of the biggest advantages that I- I know a lot of people from public schools, not only in Mississippi but in other places, um, really- really prefer about private schools."

Much like the parents who chose Colvin Academy in part due to fear of their kids being persecuted for their Christian beliefs in a public-school setting, Matt likes his school because he does not have to deal with the 'regulations' that he believes were put in place to discourage spiritual growth. Of course, these policies were implemented to uphold the Constitutional guarantee of "government neutrality toward religion" (Elifson and Hadaway 1985: 318). Additionally, in the same way that Erica implemented segregationist arguments to discuss her racial identity, Matt is drawing on similar assertions (i.e., that the removal of Christianity from the organization of public schools will lead to their downfall) to explain why his school is 'better' (e.g., Nevin and Bills 1976). Further, pointing to the perceived religious 'freedom' that Colvin Academy offers was ultimately connected to moral-laden beliefs about private vs. public school kids. As mentioned above, Colvin Academy parents and kids alike asserted that kids who go to the local public school are much more likely to have behavioral problems than CA kids. I

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asked Graham Wall what he thought the differences are between going to a public school versus a private school. He responded, "…at private school, there's no cussing there. And then at the public school, they always do it." When asked to think on why this might be, he explained, "Well because some of them might not even know the Bible themselves." Though he contended that some public-school kids might have a Bible at home, he ultimately asserted that they are not allowed to learn about it at school and therefore are more likely to participate in 'bad' behaviors, such as saying cuss words. Interestingly, when asked why their school is 'better', these kids point not to the much smaller student body or organizational differences but instead to the *kinds* of people that attend the public school, drawing clear distinctions between those kids and themselves.

In her study on affluent white children in the Midwest, Hagerman (2018) finds that kids often view themselves as more deserving, talented, and knowledgeable because they go to private school. Like the kids in Hagerman's (2018) study, Colvin Academy kids have developed a sense of entitlement by situating themselves as more hardworking and morally superior to 'lazy' and 'secular' public school kids. However, in contrast to Hagerman's (2018) work, Colvin Academy kids go to a private school that has a community-wide reputation as both racist and educationally inferior. It is especially salient, then, that CA kids view their school as academically superior, even when their own parents, who choose to send them to this school and subsequently pay lots of money to do so, do not. Of course, these notions are formed by drawing on classist and racist ideas about who deserves the 'best' education and about which families are 'good' or 'bad' (see: Alexander 2012, Coontz et al. 2008, Coontz 2016, Fetner 2011, Raleigh 2018,

Roberts 1997, 2002, Solinger 2005). Notably, though CA parents similarly drew on the tenants of the White Evangelical Tool Kit (i.e., individualism, relationalism, and anti-structuralism), they did not explicitly incorporate religion into discussions of race and racism in the same way that CA kids did.

CA Kids and the 'White Evangelical Tool Kit'

Certainly, religious socialization informs how Colvin Academy kids think about their school, themselves, and the kids who go to public school. Even more importantly, this framework also informed how the kids discussed issues of race and inequality more broadly. In many kid interviews, it was difficult to get discussions about race and racism going. In response to these attempts, several of the kids echoed sentiments about 'God's image', or the (colorblind) belief that all human beings were made in God's image and should therefore be treated equally. Alice Spencer articulated this belief when I asked her about the contemporary existence of racism: "…like I said, I think that like, we're all equal, the same. Like, we're not all that much different. Like, God created us like, who we are, and He always wants us to serve him in all the ways…". She then went on to say, "And there's this song and it's called We All Bleed the Same. Like, there's no really difference of what color we have…". Alice drew on her religious background, including a Christian rock collaboration, to rearticulate tenants of colorblind ideology (e.g., Bonilla-Silva), namely the belief that everyone is the same and that skin color does not matter. Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues that colorblind racial ideology is pliable and therefore creatively manipulated by whites to defend the 'racial status quo'. Mueller (2017: 220) similarly argues that whites participate in the maintenance of 'epistemologies of

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ignorance' to "process racial logic under conditions that make ignorance difficult." In this way, Colvin Academy kids often combined such epistemologies with the religious logic described above to deny the existence of contemporary racism and racial inequality.

In their study on Protestant Christianity and race relations, Emerson and Smith (2001) found that, "…most respondents assented to the existence of racism, as this is one expression of imperfect human nature, a result of original sin. Not surprisingly, racism was interpreted as individual-level prejudice or discrimination and nothing else." It is important to note here that though Emerson and Smith (2001) provide a clear definition of 'evangelicals', I did not ask participants about their personal religious views and therefore cannot say for certain that each one would identify with this label. However, most of the study participants spoke openly with me about the importance of Protestant Christianity to their lives. So, though some participants may not strictly identify as 'evangelicals', most did draw on the White Evangelical Tool Kit (e.g., Emerson and Smith 2001) when discussing race.

For example, when discussing the ongoing debates in Mississippi concerning the state flag, which incorporates the Confederate emblem (see: Baria 2017, Ganucheau 2017, Lohr 2017, Weiss 2018), Melinda King said,

> "I'm fine with [the state flag]. I mean, I feel like (Laughs) people this day and age always have to find something to get their panties in a wad about. Like, there always has to be something, like, 'Oh, that's discriminating against something that I'm not even apart of so I'm gonna stand up for it'. But it's not even really discriminating, it's about what we used to be. Like, we're not- we don't- cause it

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had something to do with like, slaves and stuff like that, that's why people were getting mad about it, cause they were like, 'It's discriminating against blacks' uh, like, it takes back- it goes back to the old times when blacks were slaves and stuff like that but that's not what we're based on now. It's just our flag, you know? I- but if it makes like, the United States a happier place to get rid of it, I'm fine with it. I'm not really- I mean, I don't want there always to be stuff like that going on, but I- it- even if we got rid of the flag and changed to something else, there would be something new to be angry about. Like, if we changed then the people who wanted to keep the flag would be mad and like, 'Bring back the flag'. It's just always something".

Melinda understands racism as something from 'the old times' and argues that this is not what our country is 'based on' anymore. She also asserts that banning usage of the Confederate flag will not be productive as there is 'always something' for people to be upset about. Notably, her assertion that people 'get their panties in a wad' when offended by racism works to feminize anti-racism. While having a similar discussion with Griffin Kennedy, he explained,

"I think [opponents of the Mississippi flag] interpret it for the wrong thing. [Confederate troops] were defending their home- their home soil, defending what they believed in, not just slavery. And banning- technically it's racist because they're against our culture, what we believe in. To ban our symbols and stuff we believe in. Symbols, statues, icons".

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Not only does Griffin minimize the meaning of the Confederate flag, but he also thinks it is racist to ban it as it is part of 'our' Southern culture, explicitly noting the significance of whiteness to such culture. The sentiments many Colvin Academy kids expressed about the Confederate flag and its importance to their 'heritage' and 'culture' map onto what Eastman and Schrock (2008) found in their interview study with Southern rock musicians. These musicians acknowledged that they understood the Confederate flag differently than African Americans, yet they felt that their interpretation was more important than the negative feelings the black community might have when seeing it displayed (Eastman and Schrock 2008).

When kids did acknowledge that racism might still be a problem in America, they typically noted individual-level examples to make their point, mapping onto what we know about how white evangelical Christians typically explain issues of racism and inequality (e.g., Emerson and Smith 2001). For example, Anthony Scott told me that the Trump administration is racist, explaining, "Um, of course his view on sending every illegal immigrant back to Mexico like, building a border wall just to isolate them- basically isolate them, um, makes them feel lower down". Though Anthony points to the Trump administration's immigration policies as an example of racism, he focuses on how these policies are racist at the individual level- suggesting how the wall might make Mexican people feel- leaving out a deeper discussion of institutionalized racism within the U.S. government.

To try and provide an example of institutional racism, I asked the kids for their thoughts on police brutality and Black Lives Matter. Alicia Spencer, Alice's twin, told

me she did not think police brutality really happened and that "… [black people are] just on the doubtful side, like sometimes when you're having a bad day, you just think everybody hates you". She then continued, saying, "But I mean, if it does, it's because more black people do the wrong thing than white people do". Clearly, my attempts to get at a discussion of institutional racism failed as most kids did not believe that police brutality even happened. James Cook had a similar argument, stating, "I don't think it's true [that black people are more likely to be shot by police] because like, they might be doing the wrong thing so that could be why they're getting shoot- shooted. I mean, shot. But like, white people could be doing bad stuff and they could get shot but nobody's like, bringing that much attention to it". Alicia and James are both drawing on common understandings of African Americans as inherently dangerous and inclined to criminality (e.g., Alexander 2002, Ferguson 2003, Roberts 1997, 2002, Woodhouse 2008) to justify police brutality. In contrast, Brittney Styles said, "Like, if it's a racist police officer, then they might be more inclined to shoot a black person. But I feel like as a whole, it's not really a race against race". Brittney's comment is notable as it demonstrates that even when kids did acknowledge that police brutality happens, they still interpreted it as an individual-level issue.

Emerson and Smith (2001) argue that the solutions given by white evangelical Christians for racism and inequality mirror their understandings of these problems. They write, "Anything beyond the interpersonal level is 'superficial' and, ultimately, not a solution. It is individuals who must change, not the institutions, laws, or programs that may shape individuals" (Emerson and Smith 2001: 119). In line with these findings,

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Colvin Academy kids offered individual-level solutions for dealing with the racism, which Matt Spencer described as a "heart problem". Blair Simmons told me that racism is something we, as a country, need to work on. When asked how she thought we could do this, she said, "I think basically like, being friends and loving everybody, black or white. And like, try not to be like, mean to them like cause everyone's the same, it's just different colored skin." Blair posits that cross-racial friendships are the key to ending racism in the United States, something that many evangelicals asserted in Emerson and Smith's (2001) study. Her assertion is even more notable considering the segregated racial context of childhood (e.g., Hagerman 2018) her parents, like other Colvin Academy parents, have intentionally and carefully set up for her.

On a similar note, Ava Gaines explained that she does not agree with the Trump administration's immigration policies, namely the 'wall' and Muslim ban. Notably, Ava and Anthony (discussed above) were two of the only kids interviewed who were in any way critical of Trump's immigration policies. Most kids insisted that the 'wall' is necessary for national security and often relied on explicitly racist statements about immigration to justify their position. In contrast, Ava said, "I think if it's just because of like, the religions we could try to teach them like, about God and that Jesus Christ came for our sins and I don't know, but yeah." Rather than put a ban on Muslim immigration, Ava wanted to invite immigrants into the U.S. so they could be converted to Christianity. Her thoughts on these issues demonstrate the pervasiveness of Emerson and Smith's (2001) findings as she offers an individual-level solution (i.e., religious conversion) to the discriminatory immigration policies put in place by the president of the United States,

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which is arguably one of the clearest examples of institutional racism we could think of in the contemporary climate. Of course, cross-racial friendships and religious conversion will not fully address racial inequality as we live in a racialized social system (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2018) that was designed to uphold institutional white supremacy through policy and practice (see also: Alexander 2012, Kozol 2012, Massey and Denton 1993, Omi and Winant 2015, Oliver and Shapiro1995, Roberts 1997, 2002). Overall, the ways in which the kids made sense of race, racism, and inequality (including its causes and solutions) were ultimately informed by their immersion in an environment that centered Protestant Christianity.

Colvin Academy and Comprehensive Racial Learning

Though previously understudied in work on racial socialization, Winkler's (2012) work demonstrates the importance of *place* in the formation of racial identities, including the geographic and material environment, as well as the 'social character' of a space. As Lewis (2004: 641-642) writes, "…the seriality of whiteness means that though whites do not necessarily take it up as an active identity, it still fundamentally shapes their lives…in variable ways." While scholars have begun to explore the 'variability' of whiteness, much of this work has focused on whites who are economically marginalized (see: Byrd 2018, McDermott 2006, Scott 2009, Wray 2006). For instance, McDermott's (2006) work explores the experiences of whites whose (marginalized) class status disrupts cultural explanations of inequality and are thus labeled 'pathological.'

In contrast, this study demonstrates the ways in which rurality and Southern identity prevent class-privileged whites in Mississippi from utilizing the same ideological

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'shield' afforded whites in other contexts (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018). Notably, the parents and children in this study still regularly employed colorblind and meritocratic ideology, further demonstrating its ubiquitous nature as the current dominant racial ideology in the U.S. (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018). However, this ideological work did not fully insulate them from their whiteness and the frequent accusations of racism Colvin Academy students encountered subsequently informed the formation of their own racial identity. Importantly, this would not occur in the first place if not for their class privilege, which was used by their parents to construct (and fund) a privatized and segregated context of childhood.

Additionally, this specific context of childhood was centrally important to the ways in which Colvin Academy students employed colorblind ideology. Drawing on the religious environment they have been embedded in, including a school that centers Protestant Christianity, the kids often *reworked* colorblind ideology through a religious lens. This maps directly onto Hagerman's (2016: 64) findings in which she argues, "Children have agency and are engaging with ideas presented to them through the white habitus, interpreting these ideas and then reproducing them in slightly different ways..." The reproduction of colorblind frames using religious concepts demonstrates both the agency enacted by children in the comprehensive racial learning process (e.g., Hagerman 2016, Winkler 2012) as well as the importance of religious socialization in this context. Notably, though these frames were reproduced in new and different ways, they were still being used by children to justify their role in the reproduction of racial inequality through attending a segregationist academy.

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Of course, there are plenty of kids attending segregationist academies who are not religious, just as there are plenty of kids who find religion centrally important to their lives in other schooling contexts. However, in the case of Colvin Academy, religion, rurality, Southern identity, and an all-white school environment intersect to create a unique context of childhood and a subsequent framework through which its students interpret such topics as race, racism, and inequality. As such, the kids responded to regular accusations of racism and justified their place in a segregationist academy by attempting to appeal to the perceived standards of 'ideal whiteness' (e.g., Hagerman 2016) found in rural Mississippi. This meant that they often reworked tenants of colorblind ideology through a religious framework which emphasized ideals found in Protestant Christianity, including individual responsibility and a rejection of structural inequality (e.g., Emerson and Smith 2001).

This study ultimately extends Hagerman's (2018) argument that the racial context of childhood plays a crucial role in the comprehensive racial learning processes of children and informs how they come to understand race, racism, and inequality, as well as how they mediate and express these understandings, in every day interaction. the racial context of childhood that Colvin Academy kids are growing up in is one that is predominantly white, rural, and Southern. Their use of the White Evangelical Tool Kit when discussing race, racism, and inequality further demonstrates the importance of place and context in studies of white comprehensive racial learning. Further, this study highlights the significance of race even in all-white or predominantly white spaces, demonstrating the necessity of including analyses of race in scholarship concerned with

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rural education. Exploring how comprehensive racial learning processes work in different contexts is essential to understanding how the next generation of white kids in particular participate in and inform the reproduction of dominant racial ideologies.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The research question guiding this study was: What is the relationship between segregationist academy schools and how kids come to learn about race, racism, and inequality? In order to answer this question, I explored why white parents continue to send their kids to academy schools in the present context and how they justify this choice, the historical and contemporary racial makeup of the school, as well as what this means for the reproduction of inequality. Additionally, I interviewed kids to gain a better sense of how attending these schools contributes specifically to one's 'racial context of childhood,' and what this means for comprehensive racial learning processes, or the ways in which children develop understandings of race and racial inequality.

I found that Colvin Academy parents largely defended their school choice as not racist, pointing to a myriad of seemingly race-neutral factors that led them to choose this school for their children. Notably, virtually every parent agreed that the school's academic offerings are unsatisfactory compared to the local public school and did not list academic offerings as a justification for choosing Colvin Academy. Instead, their justifications included religion, the promotion of the 'right' kind of 'family' values, fear of government control/intervention in public education, opportunities for parents to be directly involved in decision-making within the school, safety, a shard sense of community, and less competitive sports programs. When analyzed through a sociological

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lens, it became clear that each of these factors were indeed deeply racialized. Though parents perceived their school choice decision to be about anything but race, the racial context of childhood they constructed for their children reflected problematic moral-laden beliefs about race, racism, inequality, and what kinds of families and people are 'good.' Children growing up in this environment thus formed their own understandings of these issues that, for the most part, aligned with these beliefs. In this way, the context of childhood constructed around Colvin Academy worked to simultaneously reproduce material inequality and provide ideological justifications for such disparities that were often adopted and reproduced by the next generation of students.

Though parents insisted their school choice was not about race, Colvin Academy kids were frequently confronted with the racist implications of this choice and what this meant for their own white identity, including the privileges that accompany it. Situated in the rural South, this context of childhood ultimately contributed to the comprehensive racial learning processes of Colvin Academy students by depriving them of the ideological 'wall' that often protects whites from their own whiteness in the contemporary racial climate (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2018, Lewis 2004). Specifically, Colvin Academy kids were not able to 'escape' their whiteness using colorblind frames as their location in the rural South invited increased criticism. Instead, they modified these frames to justify their place in an explicitly racist environment in a way that was most appropriate for this context by reinforcing beliefs found in the White Evangelical Tool Kit, including individualism, relationalism, and anti-structuralism (e.g., Emerson and Smith 2001).

Overall, this study contributes to current understandings of the ways in which whiteness is experienced in different contexts, including the roles that class privilege and place play in comprehensive racial learning processes for white children and how these factors influence the decisions made by white parents when constructing a racial context of childhood in the first place. In her work on the different ways white children implement colorblind ideology, Hagerman (2016: 69) argues that children "…embrace a range of different performances of ideal whiteness depending on the social setting or conditions." Because the ideological work done by children in discussing race, racism, and inequality is inherently dependent on social settings (e.g., Hagerman 2016, 2018, Winkler 2012), the interview data used in this study could provide only a partial view of how Colvin Academy kids employ colorblind ideology.

Further, though schools certainly play an important and informative role in the comprehensive racial learning processes of kids, these processes are also influenced by other elements such as families and neighborhoods (e.g., Winkler 2012). Thus, a more comprehensive understanding of how racial learning processes works for white children in the rural South will necessarily include data on these other institutions, as well as how they inform/are informed by school context. The findings of this study demonstrate a need to study the specific ways in which white religious socialization influence the comprehensive racial learning processes of white children. Moving forward, I intend to use my dissertation work to delve deeper into the relationship between whiteness, religious identity, and racial learning in the context of the rural South by conducting ethnographic fieldwork with white families in their homes, schools, and churches.

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In conclusion, though Colvin Academy parents and students did not perceive their place in a segregationist academy to be racist, this context ultimately reproduces racial inequality by continuing to provide a privatized, segregated education to white children and diverting resources away from black families and children. Importantly, it also functions as an environment that encourages the reproduction and maintenance of colorblind ideology to justify such material inequality, including beliefs in the perceived moral superiority of Colvin Academy families and students. It is my hope that analyzing how racial inequality is simultaneously reproduced and justified in this context will aid the fight for racial justice by contributing to scholarship concerned with the ways in which whiteness and all its inherent privileges are transmitted and/or transformed from one generation to the next.

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APPENDIX A

TABLES

Table 1   Adult Participants

Name	Name(s) of Child(ren)	Child(ren)'s Classification	Child(ren) Interviewed
Amy Cook	Ashley	Junior High	
	James	Elementary	X
	Erica	Elementary	X
Tabatha Lewis	Will	Junior High	
	Justin	Elementary	
	Chloe	Elementary	
Evan Carter	Macey	Junior High	
Stacey and Brandon Stewart	Gavin	High School	
	Greg	Junior High	
Brenda Collins	Amelia	Junior High	
Beth Gadson	Brittany	Junior High	X
Jaclyn Green	Travis	Elementary	
	Paula	Elementary	
Sophia Hall	Tate	Junior High	X
Rita Harris	Hunter	Elementary	X
	Lacey	Elementary	
Randy Turner	Josh	High School	
	Cole	Junior High	
Stephanie King	Jacey	Junior High	X
	Melinda	Junior High	X
	Drake	High School	

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Table 1 (continued)

Jade Lee	Laila	Junior High	
	Wyatt	High School	
Claire Scott	Anthony	Junior High	X
Karen Thompson	Bailey	High School	
	Kimberly	High School	
Sarah Wall	Gabriel	Junior High	
	Graham	Elementary	X
Myra Morgan	Mandy	Elementary	
	Nolan	Elementary	
Julia Cooper	Mia	Elementary	
	Alyssa	Elementary	
Kendall Bennett	Rebecca	High School	
Karla Shaw	Savannah	Junior High	
	Shelby	Elementary	

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Table 2   Child Participants

Name	Age	Gender
Melinda King	15	Girl
Jacey King	15	Girl
Dace Mckinally	14	Boy
Brittney Styles	15	Girl
Griffin Kennedy	13	Boy
Jameson Howard	13	Boy
Matt Spencer	15	Boy
Tate Hall	14	Boy
Blair Simmons	13	Girl
Anthony Scott	15	Boy
Noah Mckinally	10	Boy
Jason Packer	12	Boy
James Cook	11	Boy
Erika Cook	11	Boy

Table 2 (continued)

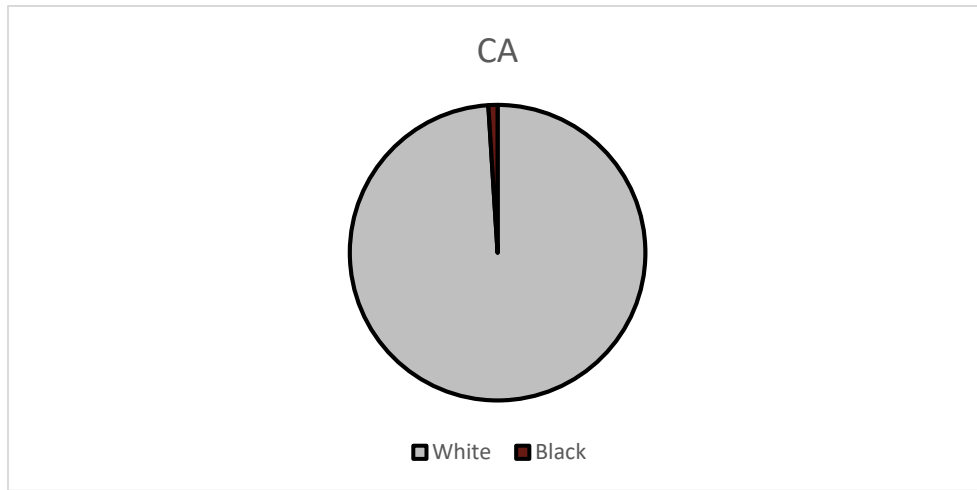|		
Hunter Harris	11	Boy
Graham Wall	11	Boy
Ellie McCarthy	13	Girl
Ava Gaines	12	Girl
Alice Spencer	11	Girl
Alicia Spencer	11	Girl

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APPENDIX B

FIGURES

Figure 1   Colvin Academy's Racial Makeup
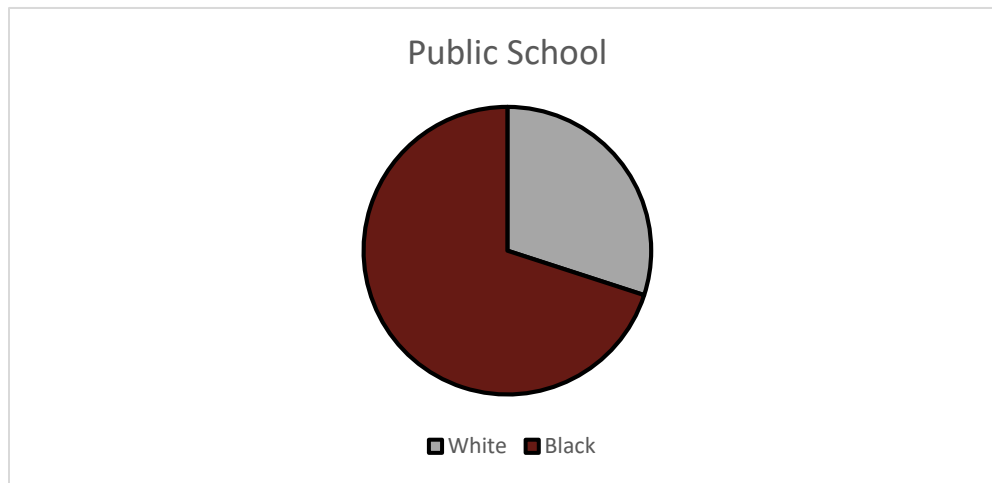
Figure 2   Racial Makeup of Local Public High School

APPENDIX C

CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS

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Title of Research Study: Mississippi School Choice Project

Study Site: Starkville, MS

Researchers: Dr. Margaret Hagerman, Ph.D., Department of Sociology, Mississippi State University; Courtney Heath, Undergraduate Sociology Major, Mississippi State University

Purpose
The purpose of this research is to learn more about how parents in Mississippi make school choices for their children.

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in an interview conducted by Courtney. Interviews will be conducted at a location of your choosing (i.e. home, work, coffee shop) and will last approximately 45-75 minutes, depending on how much you choose to share. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed by the research team. Your name will be changed in any subsequent publications or conference proceedings.

Risks or Discomforts

The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than risks of everyday life. However, if at any point in time you become too uncomfortable to continue, you can choose to end your participation in the study.

Benefits

While there may be no direct benefits to your participation, many people enjoy participating in interview-based research and appreciate the opportunity to share their views.

Confidentiality

Your interview will be audio recorded for purposes of data collection. However, once we transcribe your interview, audio recordings will be destroyed. Additionally, we will never use your name or provide any identifiable details in publications or oral proceedings involving data gathered. Any material with your name, such as this form, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.
Please note that these records will be held by a state entity and therefore are subject to disclosure if required by law. Research information may be shared with the MSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research. The information from the research may be published for scientific purposes; however, your identity will not be given out.

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Questions

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Dr. Margaret Hagerman at 662-325-0217.

For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, express concerns or complaints, request information, or offer input, please feel free to contact the MSU Research Compliance Office by phone at 662-325-3994, by e-mail at irb@research.msstate.edu, or on the web at http://orc.msstate.edu/humansubjects/participant/.

Voluntary Participation

Please understand that your **participation is voluntary.** Your **refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss** of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You **may discontinue your participation** at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____

Participant
Signature

                                                                    Date

_____

                                    _____

Investigator Signature   Date

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research project. This form provides you with information about the project. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to allow your child to participate.

Title of research project: Kids on Racism, Politics, and Inequality: From Massachusetts to Mississippi

Site of research project: Onset, MA

Name of researcher(s) & University affiliation: Margaret Hagerman Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Sociology; Courtney Heath, Graduate Student of Sociology; and Kimberly Mason Peeples M.S., Ph.D. Student of Counseling Education

The purpose of this research project:
- The purpose of this research is to understand how children in different geographic places talk about schools, families, and current events. We are particularly interested in how they discuss topics like politics and race.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research project, we will ask your child to do the following things:
- Your child will be asked to participate in an interview. You and your child will decide where you feel most comfortable conducting the interview. The interview can be conducted at the Boys and Girls Club if you wish.

The total estimated time to participate in this research project:
- The interview will last 30-75 minutes, or however long the child wishes. The interview will be audio recorded.

The risks of participation:
- While there are no physical or mental risks associated with taking part in this study, there may be times when your child may not feel comfortable during the interview. Child participants can refuse to answer any question or can refuse to participate at any time. Each child will be asked if s/he wishes to participate (assent form) and if at any point during the interview the child changes her/his mind, the interview will stop immediately.
- In addition, if the person interviewing you feels that the child is too uncomfortable, she will stop the interview.

The benefits of participation:
- There may be no direct benefit from taking part in this research study. However, you and your child may enjoy the interview process and the opportunity to share your perspectives.

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Confidentiality and privacy protections:

- While we will do everything possible to protect your child's confidentiality, your child's participation in this study may result in a loss of privacy since the things s/he says may be used in scholarly writings such as journal articles and/or books as well as academic presentations. However, your child's identity will be protected and will be identified only by a pseudonym in discussions of results. All personal information will remain confidential.

- It is important to understand that these records will be held by a state entity and therefore are subject to disclosure if required by law.

Contacts and questions:

- If you have any questions, please ask now. If you should have any questions later or want additional information, please contact Maggie Hagerman at 608-609-8445. For information regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the MSU Research Compliance Office at 662-325-3994.

If you do not want your child to participate:

Please understand that your child's participation is **voluntary.** Your refusal to allow your child to participate will involve **no penalty** or loss of benefits to which you or your child is otherwise entitled. You may discontinue your child's participation **at any time** without penalty or loss of benefits. Your child may skip any items that he or she chooses not to answer. Your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with Mississippi State University. To do so, simply tell the researcher that you wish to stop.

If after reading the information above, you agree to allow your child to participate, please sign below. If you decide later that you wish to withdraw your permission, simply tell the researcher. You may discontinue your child's participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_____

Child's name (please print)

_____

Parent or *Legally Authorized Representative's Signature   Date

_____

Parent or *Legally Authorized Representative's Signature   Date
(if applicable)

_____

Investigator's
Signature

          Date

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If a Legally Authorized Representative (rather than a parent), must have documentation to show LAR status.

Mississippi State University
Child Assent Form for Participation in Research

Project Title: Mississippi School Choice Project

Researchers: Maggie Hagerman, Courtney Heath, and Kimberly Mason Peeples

Your parent knows that we are going to ask you if you would like to be interviewed as part of our research project. You will make your own decision about whether or not you wish to participate in this project.

We want to know about kids' perspectives on schools, families, and current events. We are also interested in learning what you think about topics like politics and race. The interview will last 30-75 minutes, depending on how much you decide to say. You can always stop at any time. The interview will be audio recorded. Your name will not be written anywhere in the future if we publish what you say in a book or an article. No one will know these answers came from you.

If you don't want to participate, you can stop at any time. There will be no bad feelings if you don't want to do this. You can ask questions if you do not understand any point during the interview.

Do you understand? Is this OK?

Participant's Name (Please Print):_____

_____
Signature   Date

_____
Investigator's Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDES

Parent Interview Guide

- Can you please describe the school you attended as a child?

  PROBE: Public? Private? Academy? Region? Demographics (race/class)?

- Can you please describe the school your child/children currently attend?

  PROBE: How would you describe the demographics of this school?

- What factors led you to choose to send your child to SA?

  o Did you research the local schools before choosing SA?

  o Did you ever consider the other schooling options in town?

  o What about the public school did you not like?

  o What would need to be different about the public schools in order for you

  to send your child to them?

- What drew you to this school?

  o What do you like about the school?

  o What do you think are the weaknesses of the school?

- Would you recommend this school to any parent or do you feel like only certain

  parents would like it?

- What do you think about the Mississippi state flag?

  o Do you talk to your child about this?

Kid Interview Guide

Section A. Rapport Building

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

    a. (only ask these probes if they are quiet and need help opening up)

        i. What are your parents like?

        ii. What are your siblings like?

        iii. What kinds of things do you do for fun?

2. What is your neighborhood like? Describe it.

    a. What are the people in your neighborhood like? [probe for race]

    b. Did people put up a lot of political signs during the presidential election? What did you think about all those signs?

Section B. School and Peers

3. Can you describe your school to me?

    a. Probe for the name of the school

    b. Can you describe what kind of kids go to your school? [Probe for racial demographics]

    c. [If kid talks about different races at school] Do kids of different races get along with each other?

    d. Have you attended another school?

4. What do you really like about your school? If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be?

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5. What do you think makes your school different than other schools in your area?

    a. Do you know kids who go to these other schools?

    b. What do you think about the kids who go to these other schools?

    c. Do you think kids get the same educations at these schools? Why or why not? If not, do you think this is fair?

6. Do the other kids at your school think education is important? How do you know?

Section C: Politics

7. Some kids care a lot about politics. Other kids do not care at all. What do you think about politics? (add an i.e. what a political issue is)

    a. What political issues are important to you?

8. How did you **feel** right after the Presidential election?

    a. Did you talk about the election with your family? What did you talk about?

    b. Do you talk with your with siblings or friends about the election?

    c. At school?

        i. When President Trump was elected, some kids at other schools across the country taunted their classmates by shouting things like "Build a wall!" Did this happen at your school? What do you think

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about this kind of behavior? What would you do if it happened at your school?

9. Do you think most kids have the same political views as their parents or do you think kids make up their own minds about what they think? Why?

Section D: Race

10. What race are you? How do you know?

11. Have you ever seen someone treated differently because of their race?

12. Do you ever ask your parents questions about race?

13. Some people say that there is a lot of racial tension in America right now. What do you think?

    a. Do you think racism is still a problem in America?

Section F: Current Events

If these current events have not already come up, ask children about their perspectives on:

- Charlottesville racial tension, violence, and protest [emergence of white supremacy/white nationalism post-Trump]

- Confederate Flag/Monuments

- What do you think about the national anthem protests? [Probe about why protesting]

- Wall between US and Mexico

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- Immigration

- Gun control

- Any other?

For the topics the children know about only, ask them how these events made them feel and how thinking back on them makes them feel today. For topics the children do not know about, skip. Also probe one last time for any other current events that the child wants to discuss and probe for race within that.

Section G: Wrap-up Questions

Okay, we only have two questions left!

a. Do you think it is important for adults like me to hear about what kids like you think about the issues we talked about today? Why?

b. Is there any last word that you would like to have before I turn this off? Anything still on your mind that you want to add?

Thanks!