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"WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A STUDENT LIKE THAT?": DEFIANCE, DISRESPECT AND LACK OF MOTIVATION IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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“WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A STUDENT LIKE THAT?”:
DEFIANCE, DISRESPECT AND LACK OF MOTIVATION
IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
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Dr. Edward Morris, Professor of Sociology

Lexington, Kentucky

2012

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

“WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A STUDENT LIKE THAT?”: DEFIANCE, DISRESPECT AND LACK OF MOTIVATION IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Educators face multiple forms of misbehavior in the classroom on a regular basis. Quantitative data in the academic literature indicates that some subgroups, particularly minority students, lower income students and boys, face higher rates of disciplinary actions than their peers. Whether this indicates that those students misbehave more often, whether their actions are perceived differently by educators, or whether they are punished more harshly for their misbehavior are issues that are not well-settled by academic research. This research project addresses this gap in the literature, by addressing how the overrepresentation of subgroups may occur and by addressing the decision-making process in general, regardless of a student’s social characteristics.

This qualitative research project provides an in-depth account of daily life at a rural high school in Kentucky, illustrating instances of misbehavior within the classroom and the various methods that teachers employed to control the misbehaving students. This project gives voice to the teachers, giving consideration to the factors that impacted the decisions they made with respect to consequences for misbehavior.

This research project triangulates observations and interviews with disciplinary data from the school to provide a detailed picture of misbehavior and the resulting consequences. The teachers at this school typically gave students ample opportunity to rectify misbehavior before moving to more serious sanctions and considered consequences for most misbehavior on an individual basis. Nonetheless, minority students were overrepresented among students referred to administrators for misbehavior, indicating the possibility of a cultural mismatch between white educators and students of color. At the administrative level, consequences were fair and consistent, and no evidence of discrimination against any subgroup was demonstrated.

KEYWORDS: Education, Discipline, Cultural Capital/Mismatch, Social Reproduction, Minority Overrepresentation

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May 4, 2012

This dissertation is dedicated to my children,
Matthew, T.J., Lucas and Lindsey

“Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and
world better than you found it.”

Marian Wright Edelman (1939 -) American activist for the rights of children

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Memories of High School . . . Football fields, basketball courts, laughter shared with friends, lockers covered with photos and cartoon strips, crowded cafeterias where gossiping with friends was more common than nourishment, libraries lined with study cubicles where hours were spent writing papers worthy of future college admission. Are these the memories shared by all, or do some have better memories than others? Perhaps some recall a much different picture: social exclusion, academic frustration, failing grades, time spent in the Principal's office, detention or home on suspension. What makes the difference? Why do some students find themselves a frequent visitor to the detention or in-school suspension room while others are happily engaged in sports and clubs, seldom if ever finding their actions closely scrutinized? A "common-sense" answer might say that it is simply a difference in the students themselves: their attitudes and personalities that cause the difference. Sociology, however, moves beyond common-sense assumptions to empirical research which can add valuable insight into social conditions that might otherwise not be readily apparent. It is true that some students "get into trouble" more than others, but understanding *why* and *how* this happens can only come from sociological inquiry. Moreover, the answer may have as much to do with the educators and the process of education as with those being educated.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the processes used by teachers, guidance counselors and administrative personnel within the high school setting to determine when a student has passed the educator's final latitude of acceptance of misbehavior. The need for this type of qualitative analysis is apparent when reviewing quantitative data regarding disciplinary actions across the Commonwealth of Kentucky,

which will be addressed in the following Literature Review. The bulk of that literature addresses only the pattern of overrepresentation of racial minorities and lower socioeconomic status students as well as the male gender. A twofold gap exists in the literature: (1) addressing *how* this overrepresentation occurs, and (2) addressing the decision-making process in general, regardless of the student's social characteristics.

This project aims to rectify this gap in the literature by seeking to understand the underlying processes through which educators decide when and how to administer sanctions for misbehavior. Because this project will be carried out at only one institution, it cannot be generalized to all students within the Commonwealth. Specifically, the school under study is comprised mostly of white students. Therefore, this study emphasizes the process that teachers utilize when deciding whether or how to reprimand students informally in the classroom as well as when resorting to harsher forms of discipline, with the goal of understanding how differences in the outcomes are related to the educators' perceptions of the students, regardless of the social characteristics of the student in question. Rather than simply demonstrating through statistical evidence that some subgroups are overrepresented in disciplinary actions, this study seeks to explain what may cause that overrepresentation to occur in the first place through direct observation of the interactions between educators and the students.

This research project was not undertaken with the intention to find any particular evidence, the review of the literature which indicates substantial discrepancies in disciplinary actions between various subgroups of students notwithstanding. Some qualitative researchers discourage the use of substantial literature review prior to entering the research setting (Morse and Mitcham, 2002, citing Glaser, 1978, 1992), arguing that

this can taint the research process by predisposing the researcher to certain findings. Others (Morse and Mitcham, 2002) disagree, noting that even when one has conducted a review of the concept under study, the “pink elephant” dilemma can be avoided by recognizing that the “pink elephant” exists but exploring it closely enough to find new detail and information that was previously unacknowledged or understood. Thus, for purposes of this research project, a grounded theoretical framework has been employed, although it does not adhere to Glaser’s strict admonition of conducting no prior literature review. Glaser (1978, 1992) refers to the process of emergence: rather than forcing the findings to fit into a preconceived framework, the framework is shaped by the findings. While Labeling Theory and Reproduction Theory (discussed below) are recognized as constructs that may apply within this particular school setting, this research was undertaken with the understanding that it was just as plausible to expect that Labeling Theory and Reproduction Theory may not prove to be workable with the findings within the participating high school. Rather than forcing the situations to fit the tenets of Labeling and Reproduction Theory, this project provides an opportunity to determine what is occurring within this high school with respect to misconduct and disciplinary decisions, answering the research questions “What forms of misbehavior are occurring?”, “How does this school deal with misbehavior?” and “What factors impact the decisions being made?” Through the process of memoing and comparison it becomes clear that the elements of those theories are emerging, but in some instances the data is inconsistent with the academic literature, leading to new insights into the process of labeling and social reproduction.

The role of cultural capital (the attitudes, behaviors, language patterns, material items and skills that are valued by the educational system) and the associated home and school connection play a key role in the final analysis. This project also identifies which forms of classroom management strategies are most effective at curtailing misbehavior within the classroom based upon observed student/teacher interactions which can benefit the participating school system in particular and the research literature on effective classroom behavior management as a whole. These overarching constructs – potential discrimination based upon preconceived notions, the effects of labeling, displays of cultural capital – as well as identification of positive classroom management strategies, add a dimension to the academic literature that is currently lacking. This study provides insight into the daily life of educators within the confines of the school, providing substantial detail about the forms of misconduct that occur (answering “What is going on?”); describing the various ways that educators respond to misconduct (answering “How are they dealing with the problem?”); and then allowing the educators to voice their concerns and explain their responses (answering “What factors impact their decision-making?”). This study goes beyond the usual quantitative analysis which often indicates that discrimination among some subgroups of students is occurring, demonstrating through the emergent data that discrimination is not necessarily widespread within individual schools; that educators are aware of the potential for misbehavior that is rooted in unfavorable social circumstances; and that at the school-wide level (within this particular school), they are actively seeking ways to reduce those problems. Within the individual classrooms, the data demonstrates that teachers’ responses are a reflection of their personal tolerance level for misconduct, their

perception of students' motivational levels, their understanding of the students' social circumstances, and the level of support they expect to get from the parents and the school administrators. By providing this type of informative data, this project allows for new insights into classroom management and disciplinary practices within the educational system.

This research project took place during the Spring and Fall of 2011 with the cooperation of the administrators at Bramble County High School, the administrator of the Alternative Education Program ("AEP"), the coordinator of the behavioral management program ("PRAISE"), the teacher in charge of the In-School Suspension room known as Alternative Behavior Choices ("ABC"), one Guidance Counselor and twelve classroom teachers. All names used throughout this written work product are pseudonyms, as are the names of the high school, the alternative program, the behavioral management program and the in-school suspension program. All participants were given the assurance of confidentiality; in some instances, participants are simply referred to as "a teacher" or "an administrator" as an extra measure of confidentiality. When presumed necessary to assure confidentiality, the titles of courses have also been omitted or substituted. Finally, as this project did not entail audiotaping of classroom activities or conversations with participants, the observations and conversations are recreated as accurately as possible based upon shorthand notation taken at the time of or immediately following the conversation or event and field reports written immediately following the day's activities at the school.

This qualitative study will be divided into eight chapters. The first three chapters consist of this Introduction (Chapter One), a review of the literature (Chapter

Two) and a Methodology discussion (Chapter Three). In lieu of a typical context chapter, due to the anonymous nature of this project, a descriptive chapter (Chapter Four) is included to immerse the reader into the daily functions of the school. Chapter Four will focus first on the overall atmosphere of the school, and then turn its focus to the acts of misbehavior that become the basis for analysis in the following chapters. Attention will be given as to how the teacher responded (or in some instances failed to respond) to negative behavior exhibited by students. Consideration will be given to teacher personalities and teaching styles and how those things appeared to impact student behavior and to whether the academic level of the classes appeared to influence the quantity or type of misbehavior. By providing this detailed information in a narrative form at the beginning of the paper, the reader may become familiar with concerns facing the teachers, gaining insight into the process of discipline and decision-making at the classroom level which will allow the reader to properly situate the teachers' and administrators' comments in the following chapters into proper context.

Chapter Five will provide a brief look at school functioning from the students' perspective, based upon comments and observations rather than any direct or formal discussions with students. Within this chapter, the concepts of gendered expectations, exploring both the concept of masculinity and differences in gender expectations between boys and girls, will be examined. Symbolic displays of cultural capital will be explored, giving consideration to the students' mannerisms, their attitudes and their styles of dress. This chapter provides a brief glimpse into the mindset of the student, as it is understood through the observations and interpretation of comments and actions.

Chapter Six will focus on the perceptions of the teachers: the factors they consider important to their management of students and upon which their decisions to discipline a student are predicated. This chapter will give voice to the struggles that many teachers face on a daily basis, the impact that misbehavior, parental involvement (or lack thereof) and administrative policies have on their morale within the school. Consideration will also be given to the home life of the students (as it is known by the teachers) and how that impacts teacher responses to misbehavior. This chapter will explore the reasons that teachers give to explain the problems they encounter and the justifications they provide when defending their beliefs. It will focus on teachers' reactions to general forms of misbehavior at the school, emphasizing the teachers' perceptions of and reactions to the misbehavior. The connection between teachers and parents will be explored, as most teachers had strong feelings regarding this issue specifically with regard to parents who present a problem because they are indifferent as well as to parents who present a problem because they are over-involved. Finally, this chapter will discuss the teachers' perceptions of the handling of misbehavior at the school-wide level as this was an issue which emerged in almost all interviews and in many daily conversations.

Chapter Seven will give consideration to the viewpoints of administrators at the high school and at the adjacent collaborative Alternative Education Program. The viewpoints of the administrators will relate back to the primary concerns of (1) the importance of the connection between home and school and (2) the attitudes of defiance and disrespect among students. The decision-making process will be examined, giving consideration to how those issues impact the disciplinary actions for the students. This

chapter will also include a brief analysis of types of misbehavior that occurred at the school during the research period based upon the disciplinary data from two separate months of the academic calendar. By providing this numerical data as part of the qualitative project, it serves as another measure to determine whether or not there is evidence of discriminatory behavior at this school. As in earlier portions, specific incidences of misbehavior will be discussed and used to illustrate areas of concern and ties to the academic literature.

The final chapter, Chapter Eight, will summarize the findings, review the significance of the findings as they support or refute evidence in the academic literature, consider the limitations of the study and provide ideas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of the literature served as a guide to the construction of this research project. This review of the literature gives consideration to the theories which are often used to explain the problem of overrepresentation of certain subgroups of students in the disciplinary data, as well as documenting prior academic research which has found evidence that such problems do indeed exist.

Labeling theory is often used to explain why some groups of students are referred more often than others for disciplinary action. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be singled out for disciplinary action based upon preconceived ideas about their potential for success. Prior research has documented this linkage with social class status, noting that students who receive free lunch are at increased risk of suspension from school (Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al. 1982). While a certain behavior displayed by a lower class student may be labeled as “troublemaking” by the teacher and referred to an administrator for punishment, the same behavior by a student of higher social status may be dismissed by the teacher because the student has an actively involved parent in the school or because he or she is earning higher grades due to greater educational resources provided by the family (such as books in the home and other forms of cultural capital). Not only does this difference apply to social class, it is also applicable to race. For example, Lareau and Horvat (1999:42) argue that simply being white may operate as a type of “cultural capital”. The present research project gave consideration to educator’s perceptions and reactions to misbehavior of subgroups of students to determine if evidence of this assertion exists.

Using a relativist point of view, labeling theory asserts that an act must be *defined* as deviant to *be* deviant; no act is deviant in and of itself.

This is the chief insight of labeling theory -- that deviance results not just from the actions of the deviant but also from the responses of others, who define some actions as deviant and others actions as normal. If an adolescent misbehaves in high school a few times, teachers and the principal may punish him. However, his troubles really begin if the school authorities and the police label him a "delinquent." Surveillance of his actions will increase. Actions that authorities would normally not notice or would define as of little consequence are more likely to be interpreted as proof of his delinquency. (Brym and Lie, 2003:159).

Based upon this understanding of labeling theory, it is important to recognize that in the two most current Kentucky Safe Schools Data Project (hereinafter "SSDP") reports, two of the three most-frequently cited school board policy violations (defiance of authority and disturbing class) are very subjective in nature and open to interpretation by the teacher (as opposed to more concrete forms of violations such as tobacco violations or failure to attend detention). As argued by Ferguson (2001:68), "What is significant for us here is that readings of "defiant attitude" are often deciphered through a racialized key." Citing Gilmore's work, Ferguson (2001) notes that black students are often labeled as having an "attitude" that then impacts teachers and administrator's overall judgments about the student, even potentially affecting whether the student is placed in honors courses, regardless of objective measures of the child's academic potential.

Additionally, quantitative data does not reflect actual events in the classroom that may lead up to a child being referred for a harsher form of discipline. Because of this, it is not clear whether the minority students (and/or boys) are misbehaving at a higher rate, or if the teachers perceptions and expectations may be influencing how quickly minority students (and/or boys) are sent out of the classroom for misbehavior. Similarly, the existing SSDP data do not reflect more minor forms of punishment such as detention, in-

school suspensions, etc., so it is unclear at what rate these violations are occurring by each group (whites, minorities, boys, girls). Nonetheless, the fact that minorities in Kentucky are overrepresented in the disciplinary actions (with the exception of Asians) indicates that minorities may be victims of institutional discrimination. As noted by various authors, including Lareau and Horvat (1999) and Ferguson (2001), it is possible that some students (specifically middle class whites) are given special consideration by the school administrators while black students (who are more likely to come from a disadvantaged background) are not given the same consideration.

As noted by Skiba et al. (2002), minority overrepresentation in disciplinary patterns has been a consistent finding in social science research. Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson (2002) documents this pattern in a literature review of various research studies published between 1979 and 2000, relying on state, regional and national data sets (Skiba et al., 2002, citing Children's Defense Fund, 1975; McCarthy and Hoge, 1987; Skiba, Peterson and Williams, 1997; Thornton and Trent, 1988 and Wu, Pink, Crain and Moles, 1982). For example, the Children's Defense Fund's 1975 report found that African Americans students were between two and three times as likely to be suspended as their white peers. Similarly, McCarthy and Hoge's 1987 study reviewed 945 junior high and high school students' reported occurrences of suspension using a Likert scale (0 for never, 5 for once a month or more) and determined that the score of African Americans students was .94 and .92 (during two separate academic years), while the white student score was .48 and .54 during the same time period. Thornton and Trent (1988) reviewed records of 32,210 suspensions in East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, finding that although white students outnumbered African Americans in the student population

by sixteen percent, whites accounted for only 33% of those suspended, and African Americans the remaining 66%. Wu et al. (1982) continues this reporting of patterns of discrimination against minority students, noting a correlation between negative school governance policies (as determined based upon a questionnaire administered to school personnel as part of the Safe School Study conducted by the National Institute of Education in 1978) and rates of school suspension. More recently, Studley (2002, cited by Fenning and Rose, 2007) documented that in four of the six largest school districts in California, African American students had higher suspension rates than any other racial/ethnic group during the two years of data analyzed. Mendez, Knoff and Ferron (2002, cited by Fenning and Rose, 2007), reviewing data from Florida's second largest school district, found African American boys had higher suspension rates than any group. Most recently, near the time of completion of this research project, the Civil Rights Data Collection ("CRDC") results were published (March 2012), indicating a continuing discrepancy in discipline based on race. Specifically, African-American students represented 18% of students in the CRDC sample, but 35% of students suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of students expelled. Additionally, discrepancies were found when considering both race and gender of the students. Twenty percent of African American boys received Out-of-School Suspension, compared to seven percent of white boys, while eleven percent of African American females received an Out-of-School Suspension, compared to three percent of white girls (CRDC, 2012). Fenning and Rose (2007:548) advocate the need for a study "to examine the ways in which school personnel invoke discipline procedures for students perceived as

troublemakers or as threatening classroom control.” The present research addresses the need for such a study.

The possibility also exists, but is not well-settled in the literature, that the race, social class or gender of the teacher may impact the treatment of the students. Evidence of this ongoing question can be found in the work of Ferguson (2003) and the work of Foster (1993). As noted by Ferguson (2003:461), there is a “controversial but common assumption that teachers’ perceptions, expectations and behaviors are biased by racial stereotypes.” This common assumption of bias typically revolves around white, middle class teachers of minority, lower-class students. However, Ferguson (2003) notes that the differential treatment experienced by lower-class minority students do not appear to always be tied to differences in the race of the teacher and the student. Quoting the experience of one African American teacher, “Paula,” in a study by Cabello and Burstein (1995), Ferguson (2003:482) provides support for the notion that teachers of any race may be overburdened by the demands of some subgroups of students and thus treat those students differently:

The first thing I knew was that they were just BADD. I know part of the problem was myself because I was saying things that I probably shouldn’t have said because they got me so upset and I wasn’t able to handle it. . . . I felt that being black I would automatically know more, and so forth, and in ways I think I do, but [the training program she attended] has helped me to understand things from many perspectives. . . . Black teachers who have been in different programs. . . haven’t got this cultural awareness and I know that because they’re so negative. . . . A lot of them aren’t culturally sensitive to their own culture. (Ferguson, 2003:482, citing Cabello & Burstein, 1995:289-290).

Michele Foster (1993) paints a somewhat different picture, arguing that, historically, African American teachers have been depicted as unsympathetic and out of touch with their students. For example, she accepts the validity of Dee Ann Spencer’s 1986

interviews with fifty teachers, but notes that only one of those interviewees was an African American teacher. Foster (1993:393) shows that Spencer (1986) depicted that single African American teacher in an extremely negative manner:

Despite Valerie's own poor background, she always blamed parents for children's problems and had little sympathy for the poor. . . . Valerie's animosity toward the poor reflected her own frustrations at having to teach in a school not far from where she grew up – in the same cultural milieu (Foster 1993:383, citing Spencer, 1986).

Foster (1993) contends that this is the image that many have come to accept as the typical African American teacher. To counter this image, she presents evidence of interviews and in-depth studies of eighteen African American teachers who clearly defy this stereotype and are seen as exemplary role models for their students. Ultimately, the question of whether African American teachers, who may or may not come from the lower social class themselves, show differential treatment, either positive or negative, toward their lower-class minority students is an issue that remains open and unsettled. Likewise, whether white, middle class teachers consciously or unconsciously engage in discriminatory behavior toward lower-class, minority students is also a matter of debate. Moreover, while trends toward these findings may be available in the literature (Ferguson, 2003), it is unfair to categorically declare this as fact.

Similarly, whether male and female teachers differ in the ways they respond to students and manage misbehavior is open for further inquiry. For example, Einarsson and Granstrom (2002) observed student-teacher interactions and reported that boys, in general, are given more attention than girls. However, as girls get older, male teachers pay them more attention, but female teachers always give more attention to boys. Such a finding could be related to the fact that gender appears to play a role in the disciplinary

process, with lower reported rates of disciplinary actions for girls than boys. With respect to these gender differences in disciplinary actions, it is possible that girls, through their everyday compliance and obedience, avoid getting into trouble even when they do act out, simply because the teacher has formed a prior positive opinion of the girls. Nonetheless, when reviewing the issue of board violations under a combination lens of race and gender, it appears that black girls are more likely to exhibit the behaviors or characteristics that teachers perceive as “defiance of authority” and “disturbing class.” Returning to Ferguson’s (2001) argument of the “racialized key,” consideration should be given to the possibility that the demeanor of black girls may be interpreted *negatively*, rather than simply *differently*.

The importance of the reaction of others to a child’s primary acts of deviance, regardless of the nature of the misbehavior, should not be underestimated because it is at this point that the child may begin to accept his or her label of being “different.” It is this societal reaction that leads to secondary deviation which occurs when society applies the deviant label, followed by the individual recognizing the label and adjusting his or her behavior to reflect the new label. If the societal reaction is mild, secondary deviation may be avoided, but if the reaction is strong, secondary deviation will occur as the labeled individual comes to associate more frequently with others who have been similarly labeled and ostracized from legitimate activities.

For example, a child who is removed from the school sports team, rejected by teammates after being caught with cigarettes or alcohol, may then feel he or she has no option but to associate with others who have also been caught using illicit products. This secondary deviation may occur over a period of time, as negative reactions to the

individual's behavior escalate (Lemert, 1951, cited by Regoli, 2008). Within the educational system, punishment is usually meted out in increasing levels of severity unless the original infraction is especially dangerous or undesirable. With the first act of misbehavior, the child may be made to sit by the teacher's desk, then as misbehavior continues, be sent to the guidance counselor, next to the principal, then given detention, followed by in-school suspension, then out-of-school suspension, and finally, transfer to another school or expulsion from the system. As the reactions grow in intensity, so does the likelihood that the child or adolescent will not be permitted to play or otherwise associate with classmates, left out of sports and extracurricular activities, until he or she eventually has no one willing to accept him or her except other similarly-situated children.

Lemert (1951, cited by Regoli, 2008) goes on to note that some youths may reject the deviant "delinquent" label, but that this largely depends upon social class, with children of the lower social classes being more willing to accept the negative label. This easier acceptance can occur in two ways: either the lower-class child accepts the label more willingly because he has already recognized that society deems his parents as "inferior" in some way, or the parent themselves cause the acceptance because in their frustration with their lower status, they project their own feelings of worthlessness onto their child, thus already giving him a lower self-concept (Lemert, 1951, cited by Regoli, 2008).

The importance of this area of research becomes apparent when looking at the long-term impacts of labeling, such as the resultant systems of tracking and high school drop-out rates. Research documents that Hispanics and African American students are

overrepresented among high school dropouts, and that various significant factors impact a students' likelihood of dropping out: low-income background, frequent absences or truancy, a record of disciplinary actions, academic failure and being older than other students at that grade level (Bowditch, 1993). In this respect, Kentucky's pattern of overrepresentation of low-income, black students among students who are receiving disciplinary actions has the potential to lead to those students dropping out of school altogether. Once this occurs, the chance that the youth will go on to become involved in criminal activities increases. As explained by Ferguson:

There are serious, long-term effects of being labeled a Troublemaker that substantially increase one's chances of ending up in jail. In the daily experience of being so named, regulated, and surveilled, access to the full resources of the school are increasingly denied as the boys are isolated in nonacademic spaces in school or banished to lounging at home or loitering on the streets. Time in the school dungeon means time lost from classroom learning; suspension, at school or at home, has a direct and lasting negative effect on the continuing growth of a child (Ferguson, 2001:230).

Similarly, Bowditch (1993:495) notes that:

[i]n some instances, labeling produces additional deviance by strengthening identification with and commitment to deviance. However, since the accused individual's social, political, and economic resources shape the capacity to reject or mitigate the stigma of a deviant label, labeling may produce additional deviance merely by cutting off access to legitimate resources and opportunities.

Recent research by Adams (1996, 2003) determined that labeling by teachers and peers had a more significant impact on the child's self-concept than being formally labeled a "delinquent" by the court or the police, and that being sent to the principal's office or ostracized by peers negatively impacted their self-concept more so than negative treatment by parents (Regoli, 2008, citing Adams, 1996, 2003). Sheldon (2007) argues that all children are being subjected to a form of a priori labeling through the process of institutionalization wherein schools are being staffed with guards, metal detectors,

electronic surveillance and personal searches while at the same time instituting zero tolerance policies which may give little or no consideration to individual circumstances. Thus, labeling within the educational system, whether at the individual level or the institutional level, can have a negative and long-term impact on a child or adolescent.

Reproduction theory also plays a role in the present research. Although this research will not delve into the home life of students other than the connection between home and school as it is known by the teachers, the merits of reproduction theory can still be considered at the education-institutional level. Reproduction theory, originally conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron revolves around the maintenance of the existing social stratification system and the concept of cultural capital, which promotes this reproduction. Cultural capital, which includes attitudes, behaviors, language patterns, material items, skills, and cultural knowledge of “high culture,” is valued by the educational system. The educational system, operated by the dominant white middle class, reflects middle class values, attitudes and behaviors, and it expects students to share these beliefs and traits, irrespective of their social class background or racial heritage (Monroe, 2005). Reproduction theory argues not only that students are rewarded for adhering to middle class values and behaviors and for possessing cultural capital, but also that students who display attitudes or behaviors which indicate the student does not possess cultural capital are then penalized through various policies that inhibit their chances for academic success. The educational system, through these policies, essentially reproduces the existing social stratification system by treating students differently based on their possession (or lack thereof) of cultural capital.

Susan Dumais (2002:44), quoting Bourdieu, explains the notion of cultural capital within the educational system in the following excerpt:

By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture.

Thus, a child who is socialized in an environment which has the advantages of the middle class is prepared to perform well in the educational setting. For children who do not have this social advantage, they are placed in a position whereby their culture and knowledge is viewed as inferior and they are treated accordingly by the teachers and administrators. As noted by Lamont and Lareau (1988), understanding cultural capital has helped social scientists to better grasp the process through which social stratification continues to be reproduced and maintained. For example, teachers have been found to sort, separate and classify children within their own classrooms based upon their own expectations, leading to a distinct disadvantage for students who come to class with speech patterns that differ from middle class standards, dress codes which differ from middle class codes, and a demeanor which is sometimes interpreted as negative and defiant but when taken in context with the child's social and familial background is entirely "normal" and appropriate (Roscigno, 2006; Lareau, 2003; Ferguson, 2001; Lareau, 2000; Oakes, 1995; Rist, 1970).

Bernstein and Heath focus primarily on one particular aspect of reproduction theory, that of language patterns. Bernstein, referring to the "restricted linguistic codes" of the working class and the "elaborated linguistic codes" of the middle class, argues that

these patterns are reflective of the social order (MacLeod, 2009, citing Bernstein in Karabel and Halsey, 1977). The educational system, operated by the middle class, expects all students to come to school equipped to utilize the elaborated code even when the child may not have been socialized with these patterns. Heath, too, discusses the ramifications of divergent language patterns found within homes of differing social backgrounds and the impact those patterns have once the child enters school (MacLeod, 2009, citing Heath, 1983). For example, if both a working class child and a middle class child watch a movie with his or her parent, a working class parent may later ask the child “Did you like the movie?” while the middle class parent might question “What did you think about the movie?” These are two very distinct patterns: In the former, the child only need respond with a “yes” or “no,” while in the latter, the child is encouraged to verbalize the specifics of what he or she did not like about the movie. The educational system is designed to reflect questions such as the one posed by the middle class parent, yet all children are expected to come to school with this background of more abstract forms of thought. For students who are not prepared, this can become a “bewildering and potentially damaging experience” (MacLeod, 2009:17, citing Bernstein in Karabel and Halsey, 1977).

These patterns of irreconcilable interactions can continue into secondary schooling where a cultural mismatch becomes apparent. Within the home environment, when compared with their middle class peers, lower class children are more likely to be talked *to*, rather than *with*; more likely to be given direct orders which requires compliance rather than negotiation; less likely to be encouraged to engage in meaningful conversation with adults which reflects abstract thought; and less likely to be involved in

various forms of extracurricular activities which encourage their social, physical and/or intellectual development (Lareau, 2003). When taken as a whole, these issues further the reproduction of the existing social stratification system, as these children are socialized to see their place in the world in a subordinate status. Their teachers, meanwhile, may view their patterns of interaction as signs of disrespect or indicative of a lack of cultural capital. For example, if a child is continually *told* what to do in the home, a middle-class teacher who *asks* that something be done may be ignored or not taken seriously. The teacher's legitimacy may be questioned by the child, who may interpret the question-form of the command as an indication that the teacher is not a legitimate authority figure (Delpit, 1995). Meanwhile, the teacher issues a disciplinary consequence to the student because, in the teacher's world-view, the student failed to comply with a directive.

Other authors have found connections between social class and educational outcomes. The work of Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor* (1977), is similar in nature to the later work of Jay MacLeod in *Ain't No Making It* (2009). Studying divergent groups of boys, Willis seeks to determine why one particular group of boys overtly rejects school authority. The conclusion he reaches is that this delinquent group of boys has realized the disconnect between education and their potential for economic success. Thus, their rejection of school rules is actually part of a rational thought process similar to a cost versus benefit analysis. Just as in MacLeod's study, they have seen that getting a high school diploma has not helped many others in their neighborhood, thus their preference to defy school rules and enjoy life seems to make more sense to them than conforming to authority and school expectations which ultimately offers no rewards (Willis, 1977; MacLeod, 2009). Additionally, the concept of masculinity emerges, as the manual labor

of the working class (which requires less formal education) is equated with manliness, serving as a route to justify the boys' rejection of the educational system (Willis, 1977).

Combining the elements of labeling theory and reproduction theory, this research project qualitatively analyzes educators' perceptions of misbehavior and their reactions thereto, giving consideration to the question of whether or not certain students who display characteristics consistent with the acquisition of "cultural capital" are managed in the same or a differing manner than those students who do not appear to possess "cultural capital," which is, in and of itself, a form of labeling.

DISCIPLINARY DATA

Quantitative data from the Commonwealth of Kentucky indicates a clear gap in disciplinary actions between whites and minorities, boys and girls, and middle class students and their lower class peers (based upon free lunch status). The following data represents information derived from the Safe Schools Data Project (hereinafter "SSDP"), a project of The Kentucky Center for School Safety, housed at Eastern Kentucky University in the School of Justice and Safety, which compiles statewide information regarding infractions of school policies and the resulting disciplinary action taken against the violators.

Kentucky's school systems are predominantly white, with white students representing 83.74% of the total student population during the 2007-08 school year and 83.00% during the 2008-09 school year. Black (non-Hispanic) students represented an additional 10.61% during 2007-08 and 10.66% during 2008-09, and the remaining 5.65% in 2007-08 and 6.35% in 2008-09 are classified by the Commonwealth as "Other." The majority of board policy violators during both academic years were white (69.6% in

2007-08 and 69.08% in 2008-09), with African Americans making up most of the remainder of the violators at 25.7% (2007-08) and 25.58% (2008-09), and “others” representing 4.7% (2007-08) and 5.34% (2008-09) of violations. Thus, from a cursory review of percentages, it is clear that African Americans are overrepresented in the number of violators who are referred for disciplinary action (compared to student population), while whites are clearly underrepresented. “Others” are the closest to being represented in proportion to their rate of population (5.65% vs. 4.7% in 2007-08 and 5.34% vs. 6.35% in 2008-09). According to the SSDP, 2007-08, p. 5):

The disproportionate representation of Black students in the offender group is consistent with previous Safe Schools Data reports and suggests the need for continued study into reversing this trend.

A large discrepancy in disciplinary action based upon race is evident: the statewide rate for disciplinary actions against white students in 2007-08 was 9.09 per 100, while the rate for disciplinary actions against black students was 26.51 per 100 (SSDP, 2007-08, Appendix B4). This discrepancy can further be analyzed in terms of region: Jefferson County, which contains the largest city in the state (Louisville), had a rate of 7.03 for white students, compared to 23.03 for black students. Western Kentucky also exhibited an extreme difference of 8.00 for white students, compared to 36.99 for black students (the highest rate per 100 students statewide). Similarly, Central Kentucky exhibited an extreme difference in disciplinary rates: 10.99 per 100 for white students and 33.36 per 100 for black students (SSDP, 2007-08, Maps 4 and 5, p. 38). Thus, “[D]isciplinary actions for board policy violations for black students are almost three times higher than the rate for white students” (SSDP, 2007-08, p. 38). Moreover, the current rate of disciplinary action statewide against black students in 2007-08 was almost

identical to the statewide rate seen in 2003-04 (26.50 vs. 26.51 per 100). Disciplinary actions against whites, however, have seen an overall decrease, now at 9.09 versus 11.97 in the 2003-04 school year. Thus, while disciplinary actions against whites have decreased consistently during the time period since 2003-04, actions against blacks rose and then returned to previous levels (SSDP, 2007-08, p. 45 and 47). This situation did not change during the 2008-09 academic year.

The SSDP breaks down the number of students who received disciplinary actions based upon qualification for free lunch status. This status links students with socioeconomic status, as qualification for free lunch is an indicator of being below the poverty line. Additionally, students whose families are near the poverty line are eligible for reduced-priced lunches. The 2007-2008 report indicates that a full 68.13% of students who received a disciplinary action were recipients of free lunches, while an additional 7.12% qualified for reduced lunches. Only 24.76% of students who received a disciplinary action paid full price for their lunches. Thus, 3 of every 4 students who received some disciplinary action came from a working or lower class background.

According to the SSDP (2007-08, p. 11):

It is quite possible that this link may be due to a number of factors not measured in these data (e.g., the reduced parental involvement in school activities often seen in low-income households, additional stressors faced by students from low-income households) rather than a direct relationship between household income and school behaviors. In any case, the link between poverty and school misbehavior is an area that needs additional study.

Once again, the situation remained virtually unchanged during the most recent academic year (2008-09), with 68.96% of students who received a disciplinary action qualifying for free lunch, and an additional 7.21% receiving reduced price lunches. Only 23.83% of

students who received a disciplinary action paid full price for their lunch (SSDP, 2008-09, Chart 7).

When the two categories of race and socioeconomic status are considered simultaneously, reported by the SSDP as “violations by lunch type and race,” the pattern remains fairly consistent. The percentage of minorities receiving free lunches who received disciplinary actions continued to be higher than the percentage of whites receiving free lunches who received disciplinary actions. This particular combination of data was broken down by actual race or ethnicity (rather than Black and Other), which shows that in 2007-08, 63.8% of whites who received a disciplinary action were eligible for free lunch, compared with 78.5% for blacks, 77.2% for Hispanics and 74.1% for “other”. The data for Asians were more similar with whites, with 57.1% of Asians who received a disciplinary action being a free-lunch recipient, and 14.1% being a reduced-price lunch recipient, leaving 28.8% of Asians receiving a disciplinary action paying full price, which is almost identical to the percentage of whites receiving a disciplinary action paying full price (28.7%). Likewise, during 2008-09, 64% of whites who received a disciplinary action were eligible for free lunch, compared with 80% for blacks, and 75.4% for “all others” (SSDP, 2008-09, Chart 8).

Gender also appears to play a role in the likelihood of being referred for punishment for a rule violation. Of the 70,013 violations reported during the 2007-08 school year, 50,827 were committed by boys (72.6%) and 19,186 by girls (27.4%). The male to female ratio was almost 2.5:1 and, according to the SSDP (2007-08, p. 14), is consistent with data from previous years. Rates of board violations by gender in 2007-08 yielded a rate of 15.46 boys per 100 students and a rate of 6.17 girls per 100 students

(SSDP, 2007-08, Appendix B4). These rates remained consistent during 2008-09, with a rate of 6.22 per 100 students among girls and 15.31 per 100 students among boys (SSDP, 2008-09, Appendix B4). This data, however, is unable to convey whether girls are simply committing fewer offenses, or if their offending levels may be more similar to boys yet perceived differently by teachers and administrators, thus resulting in lower reported rates of punishment. It may be that negative behaviors are less often demonstrated by girls due to gender socialization, but it is also equally plausible that girls are given less harsh punishments (such as detention or in-school suspension) due to differing attitudes and gender expectations. For example, Dumais (2002:61) discusses the fact that girls tend to have more positive experiences in school than boys. Girls may conform to female gender role expectations, thus gaining approval and acceptance by the teachers. Nonetheless, for girls who were disciplined, a significant portion of those who received disciplinary actions were black girls (even though black students as a whole make up less than 11% of the total student population in Kentucky). For example, 37.83% of girls who were referred for a disciplinary action for defiance of authority were black, as were 33.54% of the girls who were referred due to disturbing class (SSDP, 2007-08, Appendix B15). Black girls were also significantly overrepresented in the category of bullying, comprising almost 45% of all disciplinary actions in this category. Interestingly, disciplinary actions for tobacco violations among girls were almost exclusively meted out to white girls (426 of 451 infractions) (SSDP, 2007-08, Appendix B15).

The patterns displayed in the Kentucky school systems regarding rule breaking and discipline follows patterns of inequality discussed throughout the social science

literature, including the works of Bowditch (1993), Lareau and Horvat (1999), Dumais (2002) and Ferguson (2001). They are also consistent with the findings of a variety of studies conducted over the past 25 years, referenced herein, which have linked school discipline patterns with racial, gender and socioeconomic status (Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson, 2002, citing Children's Defense Fund, 1975; McCarthy and Hoge, 1987; Skiba, Peterson and Williams, 1997; Thornton and Trent, 1988 and Wu, Pink, Crain and Moles, 1982). In sum, as noted by Skiba et al. (2002:318), "Minority overrepresentation in school punishment is by no means a new finding in school discipline research."

The academic literature provides support for the argument that differences exist in disciplinary decisions and actions based upon race, gender and social class. In particular, minorities, particularly African Americans, are overrepresented in disciplinary actions. This may be tied with social class membership, but some research indicates that differences based upon race remain even when controlling for social class membership. Gender differences are also found within the educational system, with boys being much more likely to receive disciplinary actions than girls. Labeling Theory and Social Reproduction Theory are both useful constructs for explaining these differences, but they do not specifically address the process of discipline at the individual level. The foregoing literature review and review of Kentucky disciplinary data (as well as national data) indicates a serious need for understanding the process whereby teachers and administrators choose to administer punishment to students. As noted by Gregory and Ripski (2008:337), "[L]ittle is understood about the processes between teachers and students that helps explain these trends in high school discipline." This research project seeks to rectify gaps in the literature relative to the process of deciding when and how to

discipline a student, and to a lesser extent, to which methods appear most successful at curtailing misbehavior. Moreover, this research project can provide insight into whether the gaps in disciplinary actions is pervasive across schools or whether it may be less likely in some settings than in others. Urban schools, which are often overcrowded, may use disciplinary processes that differ from rural or less crowded schools, resulting in less variance in disciplinary actions by race or class. Because this research was carried out at a single high school, this question cannot be fully answered through this study.

However, the findings discussed herein indicate that discrimination is not found at all high schools, and that the participating school (while some small differences were found) is actively working to find ways to address the problems that cause misbehavior and to treat all students, regardless of race, class or gender, fairly and consistently.

Understanding the factors that impact the decisions made by teachers and administrators is a necessary first step toward rectifying gaps in the disciplinary data, and this research project directly addresses this issue.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this project has been to gain a detailed understanding of the process that educators utilize during the routine course of a school-day to determine which behaviors constitute behavior that requires a disciplinary measure, along with the decision of what the appropriate sanction should and will be. Consideration has been given to the potential for labeling certain groups of students as being more likely to misbehave and the potential negative outcomes associated with that type of labeling. A grounded theoretical approach has been used, based upon Dick's (2005) conceptualization¹:

What most differentiates grounded theory from much other research is that it is explicitly emergent. . . . It sets out to find what theory accounts for the research situation as it is. In this respect it is like action research: the aim is to understand the research situation.

STUDY DESIGN

During the Spring academic semester of the 2010-2011 and the following Fall academic semester of the 2011-2012 school year, observations within the classrooms and in the corridors were conducted at Bramble County High School. Following the protocol approved by the University of Kentucky's Institutional Review Board, the administration at Bramble County High School was contacted to determine if the school would be interested in working with the researcher on this project. The high school administrators welcomed the opportunity, with the understanding that research findings would be made available to them so that the insight gained through the course of the study could be

¹ For purposes of this research, "grounded theory" should be construed as findings that are grounded or rooted by the observations at the high school. Glaser's (1978) strict "grounded theory" has not been utilized; rather, the spirit of grounded theory (to allow the data to guide the research project and the emerging theory) has been used to explain the process of discipline at the participating high school.

rendered useful by the administrators in furtherance of their goal of success for every student.

The researcher met with groups of teachers in the library at the beginning of the Spring Semester. Teachers rotated in and out of the library throughout the day for a conference, and at the end of each group's time in the library, an appeal for participation was made to the teachers by the researcher, providing them with an invitation letter and explaining the study to them. The participants were self-selected, consisting of a total of twelve classroom teachers, one of whom joined the study during the second semester of research when he joined the faculty at the school and learned of the ongoing research. Various administrators and educators, including two administrators and two program coordinators, were informally observed on an ongoing basis as well as formally interviewed. Another administrator participated with the interview, as did one guidance counselor. Occasionally during the study, informal conversations took place with other school personnel, but those persons were not included in the research data.

The research was conducted on a regular basis, typically two days per week, but near the end of the Spring semester, the researcher visited the school more frequently. On each research day, two teachers would be observed, chosen based on the availability of the teacher on any given day. The teachers who volunteered taught a wide variety of courses, including English, Mathematics, and Science, as well as various electives which will not be specifically named due to the small number of elective offerings at the high school, which could compromise the identity of the teacher. The same classes were observed on multiple occasions so that students could become familiar with the researcher and, as a result, would be less likely to alter their regular behavior due to the

presence of a stranger in the classroom. With each participating teacher, alternating class periods were observed over the two semesters so that comparisons could be made between groups of students and academic levels of courses as they interacted with the same teacher.

During the observation, detailed notes were taken regarding activities being carried out within the classroom, both the academic curriculum being studied at that time and the non-academic chatter and misbehavior that occurred. The actions and reactions of the teacher were noted, as were the teaching methods being employed. Notes were also made regarding the overall tone of the classes, such as whether the teacher interacted formally or in a more relaxed manner, how the students responded to the teacher and to each other, etc. These field notes were recorded at the time of the observations, while the interactions between students and teachers were occurring, so as to prevent recall bias on the part of the researcher. Most often, the researcher was situated at the back of the classroom to insure that all areas of the classroom could be observed. To the extent possible, comments between students and teachers were recorded verbatim. In some instances, the classroom environment was chaotic and conversations overlapped; those events were recorded as precisely as possible.

Informal discussions with the participating teachers were a routine occurrence, and those notes became part of the data. Similarly, brief conversations with administrators occurred throughout the study, but those were limited by the workload of the administrators. Conversations were recorded as journal entries immediately upon leaving the classroom, usually written in the library or outside the school before leaving the premises, so that accuracy of the conversations could be preserved. At the end of the

Spring semester and at the end of the Fall semester, teachers and administrators were formally interviewed following a general interview guide. The interviews were recorded through shorthand notation, with a combination of direct quotes and paraphrasing, and later transcribed at the home office of the researcher.

STUDY DEFINITIONS

To facilitate consistent usage and understanding of key concepts, the following terms are used throughout this report:

- a. Educators: This includes all personnel who have regular contact with students, including classroom teachers, administrators, program coordinators and guidance counselors.
- b. Disciplinary Actions: This refers to the outcome of referrals given to the students for misconduct in the classroom. Although the SSDP data references only the most severe outcomes (in-school and out-of-school suspension), this report contains all forms of punishment, ranging from Warnings and Parent Conferences (minor sanctions) to the most severe punishments.
- c. Informal Sanctions: This includes various actions that teachers may direct at a misbehaving student, including “sharp glances,” “shushing,” verbally reprimanding the child, moving the child to a new seating area, asking the child to stay after class to talk to the teacher about the misbehavior, or sending the child into the hallway for a cooling-off period.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This research project carefully guards the identity of all the participants, including the educators who agreed to be observed and interviewed as well as the students and

other school personnel who are observed as secondary subjects during the course of the study and who have not signed assent or consent forms. This paper conceals the identities of the educators and the administrators through the use of pseudonyms arbitrarily assigned to the participants. Additionally, the name of the school and all the related programs referenced in this report are pseudonyms.

It must be recognized that the teachers who participated in this project were self-selected through the call for volunteers. Thus, the degree to which the participating teachers are representative of the school as a whole is not known. It may be that the teachers who were most confident of their abilities to teach and/or manage students were the ones who volunteered to participate. It is plausible to expect that teachers who recognize they have problems managing defiance and disrespect in the classroom would be the ones who would be more hesitant to participate, fearing the possibility that it would reflect negatively on their reputation. This possibility exists even with the anonymity of the study participants due to the small size of the high school. That is, the administrators were aware of which teachers were participating with the project, and it is likely that the administrators would be able to identify the teachers discussed throughout this study based upon their personal knowledge of the teachers, the courses, and the students being referenced. As for generalizations, none can definitely be made; however, a wide variety of courses were observed; both sexes of teachers were observed; and teachers varied in age from being only a few years into the teaching profession to teachers who were nearing retirement age. To the extent that this project may represent the “cream of the crop” of teachers then, the question of classroom management becomes even more critical. If students were acting up in the ways described herein for the better

teachers, the possibility exists that even more severe misbehavior would have been observed in classrooms where teachers had less control and fewer positive management strategies.

RESEARCHER CONSIDERATIONS

Consideration must be given to the social location of the researcher and how those demographics have the potential to impact the research being conducted. In this instance, the research has been carried out by a white, middle class female with a background in sociological studies emphasizing social inequalities. For this reason, the researcher remained open to the possibility that while the literature suggests certain conclusions, it was entirely possible that my prior knowledge of academic findings would be challenged by the educators within the school system under study. In some instances, this did occur; the findings that are not consistent with the academic literature are noted throughout this analysis, just as findings on-point with the literature are noted.

The presence of the researcher in the classroom has the potential to cause the behavior of the teachers and the students to change based upon the fact that they are aware their behavior is under scrutiny. However, continued observations within various classrooms throughout the school during the two semesters did not indicate that this was occurring. Students still misbehaved, and they generally seemed unconcerned with my presence after the first or second observation date. Teachers likewise seemed comfortable with my presence and there was no indication of stiffness or unnatural type of behavior on the part of the teacher.

ANALYTICAL METHOD

This research project contains various forms of data, including the detailed daily logs of each observation session which describe the actions being observed as well as the reactions by the teachers and by other students to instances of misbehavior or other events; the daily reflections of the researcher regarding each day and my personal perception of the students, teachers and events; notes of the informal daily small-talk between the teachers and myself; raw disciplinary data and outcomes; and formal interviews with the educators. The data was analyzed through a dual process of memoing and constant comparison of thematic materials. Memos were written providing a brief summary of daily events, and a list of dates was organized noting common problems for ease in retrieval during the writing process. The interviews were transcribed, and a list of common phrases and terms used by the teachers were identified within the data. The interview transcripts were then highlighted to reference the common terms and phrases, so that comparisons could be made among the teachers as to their primary concerns, their handling of misbehavior, their teaching philosophies, etc. From these memos, the full daily notes of events and comments, and the interviews, it was possible to determine the themes that had emerged during the course of the study with respect to misbehavior and the teachers' and administrators' handling thereof.

As explained by Dick (2005), the collection of data, the on-site note-taking of the researcher, the coding of emergent themes and memoing by the researcher is an ongoing process, which has occurred simultaneously throughout the project. These findings have been interwoven to provide a rich and vivid depiction of routine activities and management of classroom behavior within this school. Glaser (1978, 1992) refers to this

as “emergence;” rather than forcing the findings to fit into a preconceived framework, the framework is shaped by the findings. Such is the heart of grounded theory. Within qualitative research, emphasis is placed on deriving deeper meanings from everyday actions and interactions. Accordingly, as educators decide how to manage student conduct, a larger meaning may be assigned to those decisions than simple discipline. Qualitative analysis leads to a better understanding of the *causes* of discrepancies of rates of disciplinary actions within some subgroups of students (to the small degree that this was found at this high school) because it goes beyond raw data into the actual setting.

As this project unfolded, themes emerged which were not related to the original considerations of possible gender, racial or social class bias. In particular, it became clear that teachers’ disciplinary methods were related to their knowledge of individual students, such as the level of parental involvement and their perception of student motivation. Some teachers were also impacted by their lack of confidence in the school’s in-school suspension program. Additionally, teachers have varying definitions of what it means to be a “good” teacher with respect to behavior management: some emphasize discipline in the classroom more than others; some are more willing than others to negotiate with students; some work very hard to develop personal relationships with their students while others maintain well-defined boundaries. These patterns are also reflected as dual approaches in some cases: for example, relationship building was found among both the strict disciplinarians and the negotiators. Thus, the emerging themes of this project include a variety of findings relative to discipline in the classroom.

This type of analysis highlights the benefits of grounded theory, showing that social topics are best studied in their natural setting:

The primary aim should be to describe what happens, how the people involved see and talk about their own actions and those of others, the contexts in which the action takes place, and what follows from it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:7).

Within this type of research, a thorough analysis of attitudes, feelings, vocal intonation, facial expressions, and the use of language can provide greater insight into the social atmosphere of the school and how that atmosphere impacts the daily events within the school. As noted by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:8), “[i]ndividual behavior is continually constructed, and reconstructed, on the basis of people’s interpretations of the situations they are in.” Accordingly, emphasis has been placed on occurrences of misbehavior and how those are managed by various educational personnel, either through informal sanctions or formal disciplinary actions. These observations were accompanied by in-depth interviews with the educators regarding their teaching experiences and philosophy, the problems they encounter, how they choose to address those problems, etc. In this manner, it has been possible to place the teacher’s comments regarding his or her teaching and disciplinary philosophy into context, comparing what the teachers *say* they do relative to what the teachers have been *seen* to do in practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH SETTING

This research project took place during the Spring and Fall of 2011 with the cooperation of the administrators at Bramble County High School, the administrator of the Alternative Education Program (“AEP”), the coordinator of the behavioral management program (“PRAISE”), the teacher in charge of the In-School Suspension room known as Alternative Behavior Choices (“ABC”), one Guidance Counselor and twelve classroom teachers. Because the school system and the participants in this research project have been promised anonymity, a discussion of the community setting which would name the location and provide the reader with descriptive information about the area is not possible. It is important, however, for the reader to grasp insight into the setting so that the observations can be properly situated and the researcher’s interpretations and analysis placed into proper context. For those reasons, this descriptive chapter will focus on daily life within the school. The first portion of this chapter will provide the researcher’s reflections of the overall atmosphere within the school, both positive and negative. As the chapter progresses, emphasis will be placed on negative events, including defiance of authority and misbehavior, as those are pertinent elements of this research project. This chapter is not intended to be analytical in nature; the purpose is to orient the reader to the site of the research. General conclusions will be briefly noted about the responses of the teacher to misbehavior and how those responses appeared to influence activity in the class. This provides the reader with a glimpse into the daily life of the teacher as well as the life of the student which leads to a fuller picture of life at the high school being developed as well as providing insight into how a casual observer might interpret the activities were they to sit in the classrooms themselves.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Bramble County High School is a large high school, serving approximately 1,400 students in grades ten through twelve, along with approximately 400 ninth graders who are educated in a separate wing but which is still physically connected to the main high school. Situated in between the main wing and the ninth grade wing is the Alternative Education Program which serves students who are experiencing academic failure or who are suffering from behavioral problems which have escalated to the point that students have been removed from the main high school. Some students, particularly those with behavioral issues, attend classes at the AEP on a full-time basis; others move in and out of AEP depending upon which class or classes they are failing at any given time during the school year. The high school has two stories, both of which are easily accessible from entrances on the front and back of the building. The main floor of the school, which has the front entrance, houses the main office and contains a large number of classrooms used to teach the core courses and a few electives such as foreign languages. The lower floor, accessed through the back entrance, contains the cafeteria, the main entrance to the gymnasium, the band room and several other elective-course classrooms as well as a secluded hallway where at the end one will find the room used to house students who have been assigned to in-school suspension, an area known as ABC (“Alternative Behavior Choices”). The lower floor also contains access to the ninth grade area.

The hallways are lined with posters made by students and flyers posted by various student organizations. There is no shortage of colorful artwork on display at the school, and it is common to find that teachers have posted student work near their classrooms for others to read or admire. Signs are also abundant at the school, some of them handmade

as part of coursework, some provided by formal organizations, warning students of the consequences of bullying, of dating aggression and date rape, and of the warning signs of depression and suicidal behavior. Lively signs are almost always present somewhere in the school, varied by the time of the school year, encouraging students to vote for upcoming elections, attend school drama performances, sporting events and the Prom. Community service projects were also heavily advertised, seeking student involvement in international disaster relief projects as well as local projects. At one point during this study, the school participated in a canned-food drive which was such a success that the school received regional recognition for the amount of canned food collected.

The school itself is a well-kept school; seldom was there any trash seen littering the hallways and graffiti (in the restroom) was a rarity. When it did appear, efforts were made to have it erased although those efforts were not always completely successful. Indeed, the only area where a significant amount of graffiti was ever witnessed was in the classroom holding in-school suspension, where student graffiti, vulgar and graphic, covered the desktop surfaces. By the end of this study, those desks had been removed from the room.

Teachers stand in the hallways during breaks between classes, some simply observing the students' movement through the school, but others who will converse quickly with the students, smiling and saying a brief "hello" as they move between classes. Although some teachers commented on the problem of managing behavior in the corridors due to the lack of knowing student identities given the large number of students at the school, this did not seem to be a significant issue for the administrators who seemed to be well-acquainted with the student body. Conversations with the

administrators and observations of interactions with students in common areas throughout the school indicate that the administrators take great pride in knowing the student body, engaging in informal chit-chat with students, encouraging the students to “keep up the good work” and otherwise treating students professionally and with courtesy. In turn, students were seen interacting with administrators in a relaxed and casual manner and without hesitation.

Administrators on duty in the cafeteria are almost continually in conversations with students, from school related issues to discussions about sports. On one occasion when Mr. Hunter, one of the Vice Principals, arrived to the cafeteria for monitoring duty, he brought a carry-out pizza into the room with him. Over the course of the next half hour, several students came up to ask him, jokingly, if they could have a slice. And, surprisingly, one girl reached into the box and helped herself when he wasn't looking. When he noticed that she had taken it, he responded with a quick laugh. On a more serious note, on two separate occasions of observation, students approached Mr. Hunter to apologize to him for previous misconduct, telling him they were sorry for their actions. Mr. Hunter spoke in hushed tones with both students, telling them that he appreciated the fact they had come back to him to apologize and that he trusted the problem wouldn't occur again.

The administrators are continually striving to find ways to better serve the students at Bramble County High School, whether it is for the school as a whole, as it relates to students who are at risk of academic failure, those who have poor behavioral habits such as repeated tardiness to class and those who find themselves in more serious forms of trouble. At the inception of the study, Mr. Hunter noted that the school's

campus was open to the public, making it easy for students to leave the campus unseen or for visitors to arrive on the campus unnoticed. As such, he and other administrators were working to get a grant to help the school pay for increased security systems, such as newly-keyed doors and new security cameras at entrance points. By the time the study was complete, this funding had been received and the older and broken cameras had been replaced, along with the added feature of locked entrances which required visitors to be “buzzed in” to the school. This funding also provided the necessary equipment to implement a new tardy system, providing two laptops for the electronic monitoring and recording of tardiness which generates Saturday Detention slips after three instances of tardiness.

The students at the school are a varied mixture of social class backgrounds and a small amount of racial diversity that is common throughout most of Kentucky. The percentage of students receiving free lunch within the full school district is approximately thirty-seven percent, although the percentage at the high school is hovering around twenty percent, a discrepancy which may be explained in part by the age group being serviced in this high school: some children who may have qualified for free lunch may have dropped out of school by this age, or some parents may simply no longer apply for the service. The students are very friendly with me throughout the project, and many of them recognize me in the hallway and ask me how my research is progressing or make small-talk when time allows. Those who sit near my seat in the various classrooms will almost always comment on my work and the notes that I am taking or interject their own commentary about what is happening in the classroom. This pattern repeats itself regardless of the content of the course, whether it is a required course such as English or

Math or an elective, but it deviates somewhat dependent upon the academic level of the course. Students in lower academic track courses tend to chat more openly with me, although those students also appear somewhat skeptical of my presence at the inception of the research. Perhaps this is because the higher achieving students were more focused on the academic work being taught than with visitors to the classroom, along with the lower-track students more often being off-task and talking more frequently in general. A few students in high-achieving classes break this pattern, such as Jason, who brought photos of himself as a baby to class one day and then brought them directly to my desk at the end of the class period for me to see. As a whole, the student body tends to get along well, with the school having very little problem with fighting, although it does occur occasionally. And, like most high schools, there are clearly a variety of cliques among the student body.

The overall atmosphere at this school feels warm and welcoming, students and staff alike. From the young man who greeted me with a wide smile and a happy “Hello, Visitor!” while he lay sprawled in the middle of the hallway working on a class poster with other students, to the teachers who willingly open their classroom doors for me to observe them as they teach, to the administrators who continually reply to my many emails and requests for information, to the office staff who come to expect my regular visits, to the custodial staff who always stop to chat with me when I’m observing in the cafeteria, this is a school which welcomes the opportunity to have parents, volunteers and visitors in their midst, and as a whole, it is a school that shows a great amount of pride. Nonetheless, not every student at the school seems to fit into this rosy picture of

academic and social success, and those are the students who become the focus of my observations.

The classrooms of Bramble County High School are filled with active teenagers, most of whom are active in the sense of being engaged in their studies and assigned work, but others who are simply active – actively talking to other students during lecture or work time, actively texting on cell phones or listening to Ipods, actively ignoring the teachers’ requests for order in the class, and even some who seem to be actively seeking ways to get into trouble. The various ways which their misbehavior, defiance and disrespect are managed by the teachers will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, exploring the various themes which emerged that appeared to impact the way in which teachers choose to handle non-compliant students. The primary themes include (1) the variety of approaches that teachers utilize to manage misbehaving students, which is related to their personal construct of a “good teacher”; (2) the perceptions that teachers have regarding the students’ and the parents’ attitude impact their responses to students; (3) the teachers’ awareness of the home and school connection impacts decision-making; and (4) the teachers’ lack of belief in the efficacy of the school’s in-school suspension program impacts their willingness to give referrals to misbehaving students. These themes will be woven into this context chapter and the students’ perspective chapter, as well as being examined in detail in the chapters which cover the teachers’ perspective and the administrative viewpoint.

IN THE CLASSROOM: DISRESPECT AS A PROBLEM

Junior and Senior English classes are sometimes combined into one single class for students who have fallen behind in their required English credits. By placing these

two levels together, students can be “fast tracked” into earning the necessary credits for timely graduation. However, a downside to this class structure is evident when considering which students are the ones who are part of a combined-credit course: students who have failed the standard course and who must now get caught up with their peers. The failing students are often the ones who have behavior problems which leads to time out of the classroom thus compromising their ability to stay on track academically. The failing students also tend to have more absences and tardies than their peers, which leads to academic downfall. The end result is clear: a combined English 3/4 class will be comprised of students with troubled backgrounds and absent any high achieving students who could help their struggling classmates or who might otherwise be able to spur the academic interests of their lesser-achieving peers.

One of the English 3/4 classes observed on multiple occasions is led by Ms. Greene, a soft spoken African American teacher who appears to be mid-fifties. Ms. Greene is a long-term substitute at the school, and she is the third substitute this academic term for Ms. Yardley, who has taken emergency family leave during the Spring semester. Ms. Greene will stay with this class through the end of the school year. Each time I visit this particular English 3/4 class, it is extremely chaotic. It overlaps with the lunch period, so the first thirty minute portion of this class is labeled as a study block; when the students return from lunch, the actual class period begins. Study blocks, however, are still expected to be held in an orderly fashion, and Ms. Greene works, often unsuccessfully, toward this goal.

On one particular day in March, she calls one group of girls down three times for excessive talking. Each time, they complain loudly to each other and to her, but they

eventually settle down to do some bookwork. During lunch, these same girls annoy another classmate, Jarod. Jarod returns from lunch, very frustrated with the girls, and tells Ms. Greene that he's not coming back into class with them, that they've been talking too much all day. It's evident that he is very agitated by their behavior although it isn't apparent that any of their actions have been directed toward him.

Ms. Greene tries to calm him down, using a soothing and patient tone, to no avail. When he refuses to take his seat, Ms. Greene asks the girls to accompany her into the hallway so that she can get a better idea of what has transpired. While she is speaking with the girls in the hallway, Jarod states, loudly, to no one in particular "I hate fuckin' bitches anyway." Ms. Greene returns, and asks Jarod what he would like to do about the problem. He requests to do his work in the hallway, and she allows him to move his chair out of the room where he remains for the rest of the class period.

She later explains to me that Jarod qualifies for Special Education based upon his behavioral history, but his parents have opted for him not to be formally identified to receive the services. She accommodates his needs to the best of her ability, and points out that it was the best solution, in her opinion, to allow him to work in the hallway. Had she insisted that he take his seat in the room, he would have continued to disrupt the class with his complaints, and had she sent him to ABC (the name of the In-School Suspension area), then he likely would have not done any of the assigned work. She shows me his fully completed worksheet as evidence that she made the right decision.

The question remains, however, for purposes of this research, as to whether Ms. Greene truly handled the situation effectively. On the one hand, she did accomplish two goals: first, she maintained classroom order by placing the offending student in the

hallway, albeit at his own request; second, the struggling student successfully completed that day's work. On the other hand, she allowed a non-compliant student to dictate *what* he was or was not going to do, and *where* he was going to do it. This can send a message to other students that the teacher is not in full control of the classroom, and that they too could choose or refuse to comply with the rules.

Had this type of situation been confined to a single incident, or an experience typical of only the English 3/4 class, then an appropriate analysis would be that Ms. Greene was maintaining control of this class while making concessions at the individual level for the good of the whole. However, observations of another class continued to demonstrate that while her heart was in the right place – as is apparent through the many comments she makes to me during break periods and later in her full interview – her lax discipline policy often led to a highly disruptive classroom atmosphere and was not conducive to truly effective behavior management. On another occasion, for example, rubber bands were being shot across the room by a male student, while another repeatedly bounced a small rubber ball off the back wall. Both misbehaviors were simply ignored, although they were clearly disruptive. On yet another occasion, a student climbed over chairs to get to Ms. Greene's desk to ask her a question (rather than just walking down the aisle) and students were frequently seen using their phones and Ipods during video presentations. The issue of personal space sometimes manifested itself in this class, as students were often seen touching and poking one another, and boys were seen playing with girls' hair, which would typically elicit loud complaints by the offended student, although this was more for "show" than out of any real sense of offense. "Ms. Greene, tell Chris to quit touching me!! . . . He's still doing it!!" These

outbursts served to disrupt the entire class and flow of lecture or quiet work, yet they continued throughout the semester without being effectively quashed.

By the time students return from Spring Break, I have become a familiar face in this classroom. Although they have never been reserved to the point that they controlled every aspect of their behavior, they appear more at ease with my presence and the ones who sit near my seat (next to Ms. Greene's desk) will make small talk with me before class begins. This class, like a few others, also willingly talks about things that some might consider personal issues. Because this class crosses the lunch period, the topic of free lunch comes up one day as the kids return from lunch. Jarod has decided that lunch is too expensive, and is bemoaning the fact that he doesn't get free lunches. He says his Mom went to the School Board to find out how to apply for free lunch, and was told they don't do free lunch anymore. Keisha laughs at him, and tells him "that's crazy, I get free lunch."

Whether the school participates in free lunch is not in question; as a public school receiving federal funds, it does. However, whether Jarod has made up this story, or whether his Mom was misinformed, remains unclear. In either situation, neither student, Keisha nor Jarod, seem to mind that they are discussing a sensitive economic issue in clear hearing distance of the other students in the class, Ms. Greene or myself. This is most likely due to the small town dynamics in operation. These students know each other well, regardless of the high school's overall size, and if Keisha's family qualifies for free lunches then that would likely not be a surprise to her classmates. It also indicates that Keisha is comfortable with who she is, and that she is not worried about

being judged based upon her economic status. The same could be said for Jarod, whether he has officially been qualified for free lunches notwithstanding.

Eventually, as the school year comes to a close, Ms. Greene has managed to work with these students so that all have successfully completed the course. This is quite an achievement, given that one hundred percent of this class was comprised of students who were lagging academically. Despite the constant bantering, outbursts and displays of disrespect, Ms. Greene has achieved her goal of academic success among the students. In personal discussions, as will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, Ms. Greene leaves no doubt that she sees each child as a potential success story, and she is willing to work after hours, on weekends and during Spring Break to help each student meet the minimum course requirements even if that doesn't necessarily translate into English proficiency. Nonetheless, the behavior of the students did not improve during the Spring semester, and they finish the year as unruly as when observations first began.

Ms. Greene also teaches Senior English, a general education class comprised of approximately twenty students, almost exclusively male. On every occasion that I visit this particular class, the room exudes a chaotic, almost frightening, atmosphere. The students have separated themselves into friendship groups, and conversation is never lacking in this room. Respect for Ms. Greene's authority is also lacking, as the boys challenge her at every opportunity. Although these challenges are done in a joking manner – "Ah, Ms. Greene, don't make us do that!!" – more often than not, the students do their work slowly and continue to talk and banter among themselves throughout the hour. On one occasion, Ms. Greene became very frustrated with Josh, who had talked almost non-stop during the period. Even with her frustration level clearly shown on her

face, she maintained her composure and quietly asked him if he was doing any work, to which he responded “You mean, right now? I did some work this morning.” Ms. Greene responded “I didn’t say this morning. I mean right now.” This type of student response to this particular teacher was typical, and as the observations continue throughout the semester, the non-compliance of the students increase, especially as the school year (and Senior Year, for many) comes to an end. Although this class is a general Senior English course, the behavior of the students in this classroom is no different than the students observed in the remedial English 3/4 course. In contrast, other general English courses observed with Mrs. Black and Mrs. Masters, both of whom have teaching styles that differ from Ms. Greene, are much more contained although some misbehavior was observed in those classes as well (which will be discussed below). This leads to the conclusion that the teaching style and teacher personality play a definite role in determining student behavior, in some instances more so than the academic level of the course.

IN THE CLASSROOM – LACK OF MOTIVATION AS A PROBLEM

Mrs. Black has been teaching English courses at the school for eight years. She is slender, with short blonde hair and a peppy attitude. She is constantly in motion as she lectures her students, using elaborate gestures and body language to convey the ideas and storylines of the novels she uses in her courses. On more than one occasion, I note that her enthusiasm for the material is evident, and this often (but not always) serves to keep her students engaged in activities that are otherwise passive, such as listening to audio recordings. When she utilizes audiotapes, she often starts and stops the equipment to elicit comments and reflect on the events within the scene. Even with her high-energy,

bubbly personality, she commands respect in her classroom, often speaking sharply to students when they are off-task.

As observations within her classes began, she advised me that her students generally exhibited positive attitudes and good behavior with the exception of one class period. Observations in her various classes confirmed her description, as one class of students were generally less compliant than students in her other hours. Nonetheless, the type of misbehavior displayed by those students had a completely different tone than the misbehavior witnessed down the hall in Ms. Greene's room.

On one particular day in early May, I am seated in the classroom as the students file in. They take longer than usual to settle down, and Mrs. Black wastes no time raising her voice to tell them there should be no talking. Immediately after calling the class to order, however, two girls (one African American and one white), sitting rows apart, begin to discuss the film clip that is currently being used to supplement the novel they are reading in class. "Are we going to see the ugly girl again?" the African American girl asks. The white girl, who has evidently already read the upcoming portion, replies "No." "Good," the first girl replies, "She needed to be gone, she was so ugly." Mrs. Black gives the girls a sharp glance, but says nothing.

This class is small with approximately 16 students, five of whom are minority students, which is a large number of minority students for such a small class at this high school. The minority status of this classroom, however, does not appear to play a significant role in behavior, other than the African American students are typically louder-voiced and more verbal with one another than the white students on every occasion that I visit this classroom (and which is a pattern that is demonstrated in many

classrooms that I observe and in the corridors). One particular African American male is often seen sleeping throughout the period. On this day in May, he lays his head on his desk as soon as he arrives, and appears to fall asleep almost immediately. He is using his iPod headphones, and the music is audible to the students close to him and to me, three rows away. A few minutes after class begins, he raises up, stretches broadly, and his head makes a soft “thump” as it lands back on the desk. The body language of several students in the class makes it apparent that they are disinterested in the novel (*The Great Gatsby*). One white girl and one African American boy have their heads down, arms outstretched across their desk, heads turned to the side, appearing to follow along with the reading but clearly not enjoying the story.

Similar body language is seen across the classroom, including five white girls who sit in the back seat of every row. Each of these girls have their heads down, napping. (On this particular day, only two students appear to be fully engaged in the reading and the film clips, and both of those are Hispanic students). About one third of the way through the period, Mrs. Black has finally reached her limit with the lack of engagement. “Would all of our sleepers in the back get their heads up?” In unison, the five girls raise their heads and flip their hair. The African American male who has been sleeping the entire time raises his head, pulls his hoodie over his forehead and returns to sleep. By the time the class is half finished, the other African American male, who had been at least pretending to follow along, has also fallen asleep.

This lack of interest in the material is a common theme for this group of students and this type of quiet noncompliance is observed on multiple occasions. It is much different than the unruly misbehavior observed in Ms. Greene’s course, but it nonetheless

represents a rejection of the authority of Mrs. Black to demand that the students pay attention and participate in the class. Also in contrast to Ms. Greene's insistence that every student is able to master enough material to pass is the attitude of Mrs. Black toward these non-participating students. I ask her about the continual napping in her room, and she replies: "Well, the girls back there, sometimes they pop up and comment, so I never really know if they are sleeping." Nodding to the seat occupied by the ever-snoozing African American, she says "That one, he's failed for the year. He has some ridiculous grade in here right now, less than a ten percent. And that one," gesturing to the seat occupied by the other African American male, "he's not passing either, but his grade isn't as bad as the other one. So, sometimes I get them up, and other times I think, hey, you're sixteen or seventeen, you know you're failing, your parents have been contacted and they've seen your grades. It's up to them." Other groups of students observed with Mrs. Black do not seem to have the same level of disinterest; this may be related to the particular mixture of students assigned to any given class, rather than related to Mrs. Black's teaching methods.

Mrs. Black's choice to let the students make their own academic decisions does not mean she isn't concerned about the students; rather, she lets them make their own choice as to what their class performance will be in anticipation of the adult roles they will soon assume. On multiple occasions, she is seen encouraging the students to ask questions and complete the assigned work. Her classes generally run quite smoothly, with the exception of the occasional students who are out of their seat or students who show up to class after the bell rings. The sleepers, although they are chastised for their behavior and told to sit up, do not disrupt the other students and it appears that after Mrs.

Black has brought them to attention at least once, sometimes twice, she typically ignores the behavior. Her decision to make the students responsible for their own academic success is echoed by other teachers during this study, as it is seen as a way to make the student aware of adult-like responsibilities and behavior.

IN THE CLASSROOM – SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT AS A PROBLEM

Mrs. Masters, the third English teacher who is observed during this project, runs her classroom in much the same manner as Mrs. Black, although their personalities are somewhat different. While Mrs. Black maintains a wall between herself and her students, Mrs. Masters' border between student and adult is not as clearly defined, with her students displaying more conversational tones with Mrs. Masters and a more relaxed relationship. She is approachable, and the students seem more at-ease in her class. The behavioral trade-off for this more-open relationship is the level of classroom misbehavior, which falls somewhere between the order of Mrs. Black's room and the chaos of Ms. Greene's. Mrs. Masters' students, both the Honors courses and the general courses, typically take a bit longer to settle down at the beginning of the period than Mrs. Black's students although it does not come close to the disorder seen in some other classrooms in this school. Mrs. Masters earns the respect of her students, and students at both academic levels appear to be happy to be in her course. Although they banter with her, they still are on-task most of the time. Even when students do act up, it is almost always the same few students in each class rather than the class as a whole. There is rarely any student sleeping in her class, as she keeps them engaged in activities and discussions. She calls on students at every opportunity so that the students have an equal chance of being required to participate.

On one particular day in early Spring, I observe as she teaches a Senior English course. The classroom is filled to capacity with approximately thirty students. In this class, two white boys who are close friends seem to dominate the misbehavior, and today is no different. Shortly after calling the class to order, one of the two, Brian, loudly announces to no one in particular that he is leaving at two o'clock to go fishing. The other, Jon, is using his cell phone, and Mrs. Masters asks him twice to put it away. After the second unheeded request, she walks to his desk, takes the phone from his hand and puts it in her filing cabinet. He protests that he was "just texting my Mom," to which she replies, "I don't care if you were texting the Pope, I'm tired of seeing it." Even as she says this, her tone is pleasant. Jon turns to Brian and tells him it's all his fault, and Brian, smiling widely, says to Mrs. Masters, "Come on, give him the phone. He just wants to go fishin' too. We've got As in here, sweetheart." Mrs. Masters' voice clearly shows her surprise as she responds "Sweetheart?" yet she smiles and walks away; nonetheless, she does not return the phone until the end of class. These boys are succeeding academically, and they are athletes at the school. Their attitude demonstrates that they know that they are afforded some extra measure of misbehavior without fear of consequences. This does not apply solely to Mrs. Masters' handling of their disruption of the classroom. These boys are observed on various occasions during the Spring semester in more than one setting and the same level of playful disrespect is seen multiple times.

Mrs. Masters is quick to call her students' attention to their acts of misbehavior as she is frequently observed chastising the students for being off-task or for engaging in other questionable behavior. Her tone with the students is always pleasant even when she

is reprimanding them, and this seems to add to her overall success with handling misbehaving students. For example, during one class period, the class was assigned to go through a reading in the workbook and highlight specific passages that stood out to them as important. These highlighted portions would then be used for discussion purposes. One group of four students was collaborating on the assignment, obviously looking at each other's work and sharing comments as they completed the task. She walks to the desk of one student, Jason, who has no paper on his desk, and asks him where is his work. He looks confused and says nothing; she already knows the answer, though, and turns to the student beside him and picks up Jason's paper. Her comment to the class as a whole (who had witnessed this exchange), was "Really? Has it come to this, as Seniors, that you cheat so much you even copy each other's highlighting?" She gives Jason back his paper and walks away. This type of response to acts of misbehavior, in this case a form of cheating, was typical of Mrs. Masters' interactions with the students. Although she was never harsh with the students, for too much talking, or too much collaboration, or any overt misbehavior (which was seldom witnessed), her use of sarcasm and derision effectively served to chastise the students and stop the offending act in the short-term.

IN THE CLASSROOM – DEFIANCE AND DISRESPECT CO-EXIST AS PROBLEMS

A short distance away from the novels of the English classes are the Math and Science classrooms, three of which were observed on multiple occasions throughout the research period along with one additional Math course which is held in the portable classrooms on the school property adjacent to the main building. Within these Math and Science classes, the discipline strategies of the teachers are as diverse as those witnessed

in the English department. Here, too, the problem behaviors surfaced most often (but not exclusively) in the classrooms which served the lower academic track.

The math classes are divided into the usual levels of Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry; Algebra I is taught at the ninth grade level and students who fail the course in ninth grade are required to repeat the course until they pass the course requirements. Unfortunately, for some students, this represents a significant academic challenge and some are simply not up to the task. In particular, one of Mr. Williams' classes, observed during the Fall semester when Mr. Williams joined the project, was comprised of several students who were re-taking Algebra I for the second, third, or in rare cases, the fourth time. Algebra I, Algebra II and Geometry were each observed with this teacher; however, only the groups of students at the two Algebra levels demonstrated significant levels of misbehavior, occasionally reaching the point where I, as a passive observer, often felt uncomfortable in their midst. For example, on one particular day when a chase ensued in the classroom during the Algebra I class, I was jostled from my seat as one of the boys lunged for the other student who was running away with a confiscated Ipad.

The above-mentioned class can aptly be described as testosterone-laden. The attitude of the boys shows a high degree of contempt for authority and exudes an aura of toughness, an obvious symbolic show of masculinity. Midway into the semester, I visit the classroom on a test day. They stroll in languidly, clearly unconcerned about the school's tardy policy as the bell had rung more than a couple of minutes prior to the arrival of many of the students. The tardiness is overlooked, perhaps because this class is held in a portable classroom and the students are given a few extra minutes to traverse the parking lot. As they arrive late, Mr. Williams advises them, repeatedly, to come in

and get seated so they can begin the test and have sufficient time to complete it. Many of them laugh at his mention of the test, and one white male student, with long hair hanging limply over his eyes, says with a surly tone “I don’t HAVE to take the test.” Mr. Williams responds, without pause, “No, you don’t HAVE to do anything. I can’t MAKE you do it, but I strongly suggest you do it.” While some other students observed during this project, such as Brian and Jon mentioned above, might have made a similar comment to Mrs. Masters, the attitude and tone make the difference, not the words themselves. In the case of this young boy, his tone was surly and defiant, as was the accompanying facial expression.

This group of students has a Special Education collaborating teacher in the classroom due to the identification of multiple students as academically lagging in mathematical abilities. (This collaborating teacher, Mrs. Osborne, was observed teaching in multiple math courses, a science class, an English class, and her own independently-taught English class. She has a very strict demeanor with the students, but this does not mean that she has not developed close relationships with the students with whom she works. A few of her more-needy students, some of whom are identified with behavior disorders, have her cell phone number and they know they can call on her if they have a problem at home, both with their homework and with their personal, sometimes turbulent, home lives.)

She and Mr. Williams get the class settled down to take the test, and they immediately begin to circle the classroom both in an attempt to keep the students on-task and to answer any questions. As the test begins, two white students are using headphones. One boy has his volume turned up quite loud. He is first *asked* to turn it

down, and then *told* to turn it down, which he does after the second admonishment, but the music volume soon returns to the original level. Shortly after the test begins, a final tardy student arrives to class. He is the only African American boy present that day, and his clothing represents the classic “gangster” look: bright purple hoodie, shorts hanging at his ankles, belted, but with the belt far below his underwear. His tee-shirt, several sizes too large, serves to cover his boxer briefs. Similarly, he affects the standard gangster walk with an exaggerated gait, strolling across the room to take a seat by the window which he immediately begins to gaze out, ignoring the test placed before him. Yet another student is loudly humming *Amazing Grace*; he is told three times during the test to stop humming, but nothing is done to reinforce this admonition just as nothing further is done to the student with the volume turned up on his headphones. Two other young boys have talked for at least ten minutes during the first part of the test, and Mrs. Osborne tells one of them in her no-nonsense tone to move to another seat. He does so without complaint, but the student he leaves behind then turns in his test and looks quite distressed; clearly, the cheating process had been interrupted by the change of seats.

A white boy, who is clean-cut with short cropped hair and a fitted tee-shirt, is noisily breaking his pencils into small pieces. Mrs. Osborne admonishes him politely but sharply “Please stop that” to which he replies, “Why?” This questioning of authority is typical of the students in this class, who seem to want to haggle over even simple requests for compliance. Nonetheless, I am a bit surprised by this student’s defiant tone, as he would otherwise fit the image of a leader within the classroom, in comparison to many of the other students in this class. (Perhaps, I realize, I have begun to subjectively label the students myself based upon my perception of cultural capital, even as I am

trying to remain neutral). Nonetheless, Mrs. Osborne gives him a response to his question and says, in slow, broken sentences: “Because it’s distracting to others. And you do it every day. It’s ridiculous. It’s elementary.” He walks, sulkily, to the trashcan and slowly drops the pieces in, one by one, as if further defying her authority.

Several students in the classroom, today and the many occasions they are observed, carry this same look of defiance in their eyes. It is a look that says “I don’t care,” and it is a look that I have come to know well in Mr. Williams’ class, Ms. Greene’s class, and Mrs. Thomas’ class (which will be discussed below). With rare exception, these students display little evidence of pride in their appearance; most have long, oily hair, often unbrushed, and their choice of clothing is typically some shade of black or gray with a random, undecipherable design on the front, or in other cases, reminiscent of the inner-city gang look.

As soon as this incident is wrapped up, another begins across the room, with Zach, a boy with the same type of scowl, wearing a hat in the class that is clearly against school policy, flinging his ink pen across the room. Once again Mrs. Osborne employs politeness but firmness, telling him matter-of-factly “Please don’t do that.” Zach’s response is also typical: he neutralizes his action by pointing out “Jose is doing it too.” She responds, “Maybe. But you’re the one I saw whose pen just went across the room.” Turning to Jose, she simply says “Please stop.” By the time the period is almost over, the students are quite restless. Most of the students have completed the test, yet no other work has been given to them to keep them occupied. (Assigning work, however, is not synonymous for being on-task with these students). Someone passes gas loudly, to which a girl in the class emphatically responds, to no one in particular, but loudly enough to be

heard throughout the room “Oh - My - God. Did someone just shit their pants?” Mrs. Osborne admonishes them again to “Please be quiet. It’s a test.” This day, even though it has been a day of testing, has been much like the other occasions this group of students has been observed.

Attempts to control student behavior in this Algebra class are quite ineffective. While it is typical of Mrs. Osborne’s teaching style to be firm yet polite with the students, this approach is made all the more ineffective given the particular group of students and the identification of some as being in need of special services. The alternative, however, is one that teachers repeatedly tell me -- from the inception of the study to my final day at the high school -- that they try to avoid at all costs: sending the student out of the classroom. Being out of the room means loss of instructional time which is interpreted as a disservice to the students. “Students who aren’t in the classroom are not going to be learning” is the mantra that is repeated to me on multiple occasions. Nonetheless, it is a policy that appears questionable when working with a troubled group of students such as this.

Similar scenarios unfold in another of Mr. Williams’ Algebra classes. Shortly after the preceding incident, I visited his classroom during a different time of day, observing yet another group of academically lagging students. A notable difference, however, is the lack of a special education collaborator during this period, a feature which is missing, Mr. Williams explains to me early in the semester, because there are no students in this class who are formally identified as qualifying for math assistance. This class, as unruly as the other class, is conducted solely by Mr. Williams, and it is common for his patience to be sorely tested. Mr. Williams is in the process of returning a test, and

the entire classroom is full of boisterous chatter and laughter despite his admonitions to settle down. As he begins to review the test answers, the noise continues. He loudly proclaims, “I’m tired of it. I don’t care anymore. I’m going to just call Hunter or O’Neil to take you off to ABC, because I’m just tired of it. Which part do you not get?” This is not the first time I’ve heard him threaten to send students to ABC, and at other times, he has even picked up referral slips from his desk and carried them around with him during instruction as a type of visible threat. Unfortunately, in this class (as in the other) the students do not fear the threat of ABC nor do they seem to care if he actually carries through with it.

They continue to talk during his review of the test with so many separate conversations being carried on that no one specific conversation can be deciphered. One white boy, sitting by the window, is peeking through the cracks of the blinds, and Mr. Williams tells him to leave the blinds alone, to which the student challenges him with a blunt “Why?” Mr. Williams looks at him sharply and tells him he will move him if the behavior continues; the student shrugs and drops the blinds. Two other white boys sitting directly in front of me are drumming loudly on their desks with their pencils, in rhythm. Both look disheveled, one with a tight-fitted, tattered thermal shirt, and the other wearing a well-worn tee with uncombed hair. Yet another white boy, Mitchell, is complaining about failing the test. Mr. Williams says to him, “How many times have you taken this course?” to which Mitchell responds, “Four.”

“Four times and you should have known this material,” Mr. Williams replies.
“What was your score?”

“Forty seven out of a hundred,” Mitchell replies.

“Why do you think you got that score?” Mr. Williams asks.

“Because I went to sleep,” Mitchell admits, although he smirks as he says it.

“Well, welcome to the real world,” Mr. Williams tells him.

Similar to the students in Mr. Williams’ other Algebra class, many of these students, Mitchell included, carry the disinterested look in their eyes, complete with a permanent scowl on their foreheads. Just as Mitchell has taken this course four times, several other boys also appear older than they should be for a basic Algebra class. Regardless of their appearance, they are immature for their biological age. The atmosphere in this class is uncomfortable, and I make a reflection note that it is almost embarrassing to me to sit in this classroom and watch the disorder unfold.

In sharp contrast to the courses described above, Mr. Williams’ Geometry class is consistently quite well-behaved. The students in that class file in quietly and orderly, and the fact that the class is held in a portable classroom does not provide them with an excuse to be tardy. They arrive in a timely manner, take their seats and arrange their notebooks on their desks. While there is always some small talk as the class begins, they settle down quickly as Mr. Williams begins the class with his typical routine of showing them an example of the type of math problems they will be working on that day. After providing them a couple of working examples, he gives them an assignment and they work, sometimes quietly asking each other questions or directions, but never misbehaving as the Algebra classes seem to do on a daily basis. One reason for this may be that the class is a mixture of boys and girls, rather than primarily male as the Algebra classes are, and also that Geometry is a more-rigorous Math class that indicates some prior mastery of mathematical concepts and academic ability. This is a pattern that

repeats itself continuously throughout the study with all three Math teachers who participate with the project: Algebra I classes are the most troubled, and fewer episodes of misbehavior are demonstrated in the Algebra II and Geometry sections.

The attitude of disrespect that is exhibited toward Mr. Williams in his remedial classes is not limited specifically to Mr. Williams. During one day of research, Mr. Williams was out for a sick day with Mrs. O'Connor serving as the substitute. She, too, found herself subjected to the disrespectful tones of several students. Mrs. O'Connor has served as a substitute for many years in the county school system so she is familiar with many of the students. She carries a no-nonsense air, a desirable trait for a substitute teacher given that many students appear to treat substitutes with even less respect than that which is given to the regular classroom teacher. Although she called Mr. Williams' Algebra class to order very quickly and immediately set to the task of passing out worksheets, the room was soon chaotic, filled with giggling voices, students' texting and listening to iPods. She spots Jorge, a Hispanic student who often disrupts class, rapidly texting on his phone; she asks him put it away. He responds "Oh, yeah, sure" but continues texting and makes no move to put the phone away. She waits a brief moment, then says "What was that? Yeah sure?" to which he responds, somewhat mockingly, "I said yes, ma'am." "That's not what I heard" she comments sharply. At this point, Jorge responds loudly, his words punctuated by brief pauses between each word, while his voice drips with derision, "You – SAID - to – put – it - away, - and - I've - put - it - away." His tone silences the otherwise giggling voices in the room, evidently surprising even the regular incorrigibles with his voice. All eyes were turned to this verbal exchange between Jorge and Mrs. O'Connor, with the tension almost palpable. He seems

to have won this battle of wills, as she lets the matter go, saying “Okay, let’s keep it that way.” A regular classroom teacher would surely have sent Jorge out of the room immediately, but the substitute seemingly accepts this as par for the course. At the end of class when I chat with her about the class, she reminds me that the first class of students that day had been a very well-behaved group. “Sometimes you just get a mix like this, and it’s not even worth trying. You just have to say ‘I’m not even going to go there’ because if you fight them, it just makes them worse.”

Mrs. Thomas, another math teacher involved in the research, is often as distressed as Mr. Williams with certain groups of students, a problem which is exacerbated during the Fall semester when a fourth math teacher quits and the decision is made to re-assign the students to other math sections rather than hire a replacement teacher. This leads to significant overcrowding in some classes which is made all the worse in the sections that contained multiple students with behavior problems in the first place. Mrs. Thomas has been teaching at the school for seventeen years, so she is better-equipped with experience to handle large classes than other teachers might be. Nevertheless, she conveys her dismay over the large numbers of students to me several times during the Fall, pointing out how difficult it is to *manage* large classes, one of 32 and one of 33, much less actually *teach* the material.

In contrast to Mr. Williams’ threats to send students to ABC, Mrs. Thomas calls the PRAISE instructors on a regular basis. PRAISE instructors serve an intermediary role; these instructors talk to the misbehaving students outside the classroom and attempt to get the students to reflect on their behavior in order to prevent it from reoccurring. If that fails, the students are then referred to an administrator, who determines if a formal

punishment is warranted. PRAISE does often appear successful in the short-term, but the fact that they are continually called to the same two sections of Mrs. Thomas' class (both of which are lower academic track courses), leaves open the question of the long-term effectiveness of the approach. Nevertheless, PRAISE does serve to free up Mrs. Thomas' time to focus on instructional material rather than keeping her engaged in managing misbehaving students to the detriment of the academic process, and the PRAISE instructors are generally successful at curbing misbehavior at any given time.

Students who misbehave, however, will do so regardless of the class size. In the Spring, Mrs. Thomas' classes were of average size yet she still faced daily struggles with certain sections. In one class of approximately seventeen, she reviews her class roster with me one day prior to class. Two were on out-of-school suspension, one had gone to homebound, one was absent that day (known to be skipping), two were definitely failing, another on the borderline, and six were identified as in need of special education services. "That's about normal for this class," she remarks. In this particular class one of the continual problem-behavior students was a white girl who could not, or would not, stop talking. This student, Marjorie, was observed with similar behavior in other classes in the school, so the misbehavior was not limited to Mrs. Thomas' room or related to Mrs. Thomas' manner of responding to her actions.

At the inception of the study, on the first day I visited this class, Mrs. Thomas advised me: "Attrition, don't give a crap, you name it, we got it. If you're here to come up with some better ways to deal with students like this, you're probably too late to help this bunch." Although she has clearly already resigned herself to accept the failure of some of the students, this does not mean she has ceased to try to engage the students. She

is an energetic teacher with a loud voice that commends attention. She repeats material continuously, providing students with multiple working examples in an attempt to help them grasp the material. However, the academic challenge that she is faced with is often insurmountable.

One day in mid-Spring, as they work through a formula on the board, she is calling on students to engage them in the process. A white boy, who is identified as Special Education Eligible, takes a significantly long time to respond to her question to subtract four from six. Finally, the hyperactive girl, Marjorie, says “Say two, Scott.” He responds, “Two Scott” and the class erupts in laughter. Another white boy, who is not identified as Special Education Eligible, has a similarly difficult time responding to nine minus seventeen. The idea of a negative number seems beyond his comprehension. During this same portion of material, three additional white boys are called on to respond to which they simply say “Pass.” They do not even look at the board to review the problem before giving up the opportunity to participate.

While students are often sorted into levels based upon academic abilities for core courses such as English, Math and Science, elective course are often a mix of students, based upon student interest in the subject or, as is sometimes the case, based upon whichever elective class was open for late enrollment. Mr. Jones’ elective course, humanities, was visited several times during the Spring and Fall semesters. In some sections, the students were clearly engaged in the material, but in other sections misbehavior was a common occurrence regardless of Mr. Jones’ attempts to control the students. In one particular class that I observed multiple times, I often noted that the

class left me with a sense of unease. The tension in the class was so high, it felt as if an explosion were imminent.

The class contains a mixture of boys and girls, but female behavior in this class seems little different than male behavior so gender does not appear to be influencing the level of misconduct. The first time I observe this class, my presence is questioned by one white student, Mike, whom I will come to learn is the ringleader of the troubled students in this class. He asks who I am and why am I there, to which Mr. Jones responds that I'm just an observer from the University and that it doesn't really matter. "The hell it don't," Mike responds. He is distracted by his female seatmate, however, who speaks up and tells no one in particular, "You all shut up. My mom's in the motherfuckin' hospital and I don't feel like listening to it." Her use of such a foul word, aloud in class with the teacher present, surprises me. Mr. Jones tells her to be quiet, but he doesn't specifically mention her use of the word. Shortly after the class begins, Brian, a white boy who has the typical look of a student who is into the "punk scene," turns to me and tells me that I'm going to be disappointed by observing this class. Mike has a pencil on his desk that he is flipping and then retrieving, repeatedly, and Mr. Jones asks him for the pencil. Mike refuses, saying "It's my pencil." Mr. Jones says, "No, it's from the supply desk" and Mike says "Bullshit it is." Mr. Jones tells him that he is going to write a referral to the office if he doesn't give him the pencil, and Mike tells him to "go ahead." A white girl seated nearby pulls open a drawer near Mike's desk and tells Mr. Jones to "look at this," although it isn't clear if she is trying to confirm Mr. Jones' assertion that the pencils are part of the room's supply or Mike's personal supply. She has a ball of twine that is meant to be used for a project, and she tosses the twine to Mike

for some unknown reason. Mr. Jones tells Mike to put it away, that it is to be used on a project in the following class section. Instead, Mike tosses the twine even further across the room to Nicole, a white girl seated next to Brian, who has been talking non-stop as Mr. Jones attempted to begin lecture. With each toss, the twine unravels a bit more, so that yards of twine are now strung across desks as the ball makes its way farther from its starting point. “Hey, Mr. Jones said to put this up,” he tells her, but she tosses it across to Brian, and then together she and Brian finish unraveling the ball of twine and actually tie up another girl, Natalie, who is sitting in class talking on her cell phone.

Mr. Jones pleads with the students to settle down, and four boys at the front of the class encourage the others to stop “acting like idiots.” (These boys unobtrusively assist Mr. Jones in his management of unruly students, admonishing them to settle down or act right which serves as a form of positive peer pressure among the unruly students. They also consistently address Mr. Jones as “Sir,” which helps to reinforce his position of authority in the classroom, serving as a subtle reminder to the misbehaving students that Mr. Jones deserves respect). At the end of the class, Mr. Jones follows through on his threat to give Mike a referral to the administrators for his misbehavior, and admonishes him politely but firmly that “It’s very disrespectful to talk to a teacher the way you did to me today.” Mike, however, simply shrugs and makes some non-committal noise, not apologizing for his actions. On other occasions when I visit Mr. Jones’ room during this same class period, the class is noticeably calmer on days when Mike is absent, which is often, either due to actual absence or his presence in ABC on many occasions. The chatter that continues during Mr. Jones’ lectures is a frequent problem, along with the use

of foul language among students, but overt misbehavior such as the twine incident are uncommon.

IN THE COMMON AREAS

The school is built so that there is a small area outside the cafeteria that cannot be seen from any windows or doors within the school. It is on a corner, about three feet wide by five feet long, where two wings of the school are not built in alignment. This area is known by teachers and administrators to be an area where students will attempt to sneak a cigarette or (rarely) complete a drug deal. Because of this, teachers who are on hallway monitoring duty step outdoors occasionally to make sure the corner is unoccupied.

One day in early March, I was walking the hallway duty with an administrator when the door closest to the corner opened and a white boy strolled in, clearly unconcerned about the possibility of getting caught for being “out of area,” as he was yelling loudly over his shoulder to another student still outside. Noticing our presence, he laughingly proclaimed to the administrator that “You better go check out there. He’s out there doing drugs.” The administrator admonished him sharply, in no uncertain terms, to “Get to class!” Turning to me, he stated: “He’s a smart kid. He could probably get a 32 on the ACT, but he’ll be in jail by this time next year.” This incident, and the accompanying short statement, shows the multi-faceted impact of labeling. First, this is a student that is expected to be in some type of trouble based upon his past history, but there also appears to be a softer side to this label as there is the accompanying recognition that this is a student who has the *potential* to be something else: an academic success. It is possible that this is the reason why the student was simply admonished to go to class,

rather than being interrogated about why he was outside or what he was doing while there (or it could have been due to my presence, a possibility which should be considered).

Upon further inquiry into the punishment for being out of area or for being caught smoking a cigarette, it is explained to me that students are generally given a day in ABC (the name for In-School Suspension), or for repeat offenders, Saturday detention).

Lunchtime is synonymous with social time, and the cafeteria is a boisterous area. Teachers are routinely assigned monitoring duty during lunch to maintain order and manage the fights which occasionally break out. An administrator is almost always on duty in the lunchroom, too, in an effort to further quell the chaos that can erupt in a room filled with 400 adolescents. Commonly, especially during the Spring semester when a strict no-use-of-technology policy is in effect, students are admonished to turn off their headphones, Ipods or cell phones, and occasionally the items are confiscated when students repeatedly ignore the restrictions. Dress code violations are a daily occurrence at the school, ranging from girls wearing skirts that are too short and tops that are too low, to boys who consistently wear their hoodies or caps despite the rule against having them on their heads inside the building. Occasionally, wording on clothing is questionable, and various fashions, such as sagging, are witnessed.

I visit the lunchroom frequently to observe the casual interactions of teachers and administrators with the students, as this is a venue that provides an opportunity for relaxed interactions as well as rule enforcement. On two separate occasions, two administrators, both of whom are aware that I am studying aspects of misbehavior at the school, take time to point out tables of students who are known to be the troublemakers at the school. On another occasion, as I stand near the lunch line with an administrator, a

white boy strolls by, wearing large plastic black-rimmed glasses held together at the bridge with duct tape. This is obviously an adolescent attempt to mimic a “nerd-like” character, and it elicits laughter from the administrator on duty. “Really?” he asks the student, and pats him on the back as he passes by. Turning to me, he remarks: “I know his daddy. He’s a good kid. I’ve coached with his dad.” Although the student was not breaking any actual rule with the outrageous glasses, the operation of social capital is evident. Whether the student was breaking policy notwithstanding, the recognition of the student as a “good kid,” as well as the community impact of the sports affiliation, gives the student a bit more leeway to push the envelope of appropriate behavior without fear of being sanctioned.

This incident speaks to the significance of place in the educational context; students in small communities who have parents who are active participants within the community will be recognized rather than being “lost in the crowd.” Those students will also have likely developed an appreciation for the extra amount of consideration that family connection provides them, and some of them may use this to their advantage. The significance of place can also be dysfunctional for the school when students in farming communities or students in impoverished neighborhoods begin to devalue the educational system because they believe it serves no functional purpose for the life they expect to lead, carrying on the family tradition of farming or working in blue-collar occupations that do not require significant amounts of critical thinking or mathematical knowledge. Based upon the observations, those described above and in the following chapters, this social construction of reality among some students (i.e., “school isn’t

relevant to me”) leads to a significant amount of the misbehavior found at this particular high school.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Students and their perceptions of the school become a critical component of this study, even as the students were not the direct focus of this research project. While students were observed going about their daily lives at the school, in and out of the classroom, it was the response of the teachers to acts of misbehavior which were the focus of this research. Nonetheless, a significant portion of this project was devoted to recording student behavior, particularly that which deviated from the acceptable standards of conduct. Because of this, a better understanding of how students view the school, the rules and the individuals who enforce the rules, as well as how they see themselves fitting in, can be achieved. It is important to remember, as one reads this chapter, that the student perspective is being filtered through the personal lens of the researcher. Although this chapter will include direct comments made by students in conversation or to the teachers, the interpretation of those comments and recorded events is derived from my observations and not from any follow-up conversations with the students. Interwoven with this student perspective are the teachers' and administrators' reactions which combine to form a fuller picture of how students struggle to find their place within the school.

GENDERED BEHAVIOR AND SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS

Gender expectations also play a role in student behavior and the reactions of authority figures. The cultural gendered expectation of female behavior is aligned with passivity, compliance and deference to authority (Seccombe, 2012). Many teachers who participated in this study were quick to reprimand misbehavior among girls, typically through the use of a brief warning to stop the offending behavior, while misbehaving

boys were often given more latitude in their level of misbehavior before a reprimand would be issued. In one Algebra II class taught by Mrs. Caudill, two students (both white, one girl and one boy) were observed to be off-task almost the entire class period, whispering loudly and softly laughing, during both the instructional period of the class and the ensuing work time. The girl, Leah, was quickly called down by the teacher when the whispering reached a certain level of disruption, shortly thereafter followed by the teacher calling on Leah to respond to a problem on the board in an attempt to get her to focus on the material, followed by the teacher next querying Leah as to why she was not working, and finally followed by the teacher standing next to Leah's desk and working through a problem with her. Although Leah received no serious consequences for her continual talking, the teacher attempted several times during the course of the class period to bring her back to the subject at hand. Conversely, the boy, who was equally guilty of misbehaving, received only one verbal reprimand for his misbehavior.

Girls who routinely defied gender expectations – those who were loud, talkative and non-compliant on a regular basis – became the focus of the teachers' attention, both at the time of misbehavior and during later informal discussions and formal interviews. These girls had caught the attention of the teachers, and once they were labeled as nonconformists, their misbehavior was not soon forgotten. For example, Marjorie, a white girl in Mrs. Thomas' class, was known as a loud, argumentative student and Mrs. Thomas seemed to dread the class period in which Marjorie was a student. Not only did Marjorie argue with the teachers, but she sparred, quite vocally, with classmates, often disrupting the instructional process. During one class period, Marjorie bantered back and forth with Steve, a white classmate, for a significant portion of the class time.

Marjorie: “Stop looking at me like that, Steve.”

Steve: “Like what?”

Marjorie: “Like THAT. You’re gonna make me mad.”

Steve: “I’m not doin’ anything.

Marjorie: “You’re making me mad, Steve, and I’m not even playing.”

Mrs. Thomas admonishes Marjorie to be quiet and settle down, although there is no similar admonishment to Steve. The result is a temporary solution; Marjorie settles to work for a few minutes, then begins complaining about and to Steve again.

A hair styling salon had dropped off some product samples to students earlier that day, and Steve has some of these samples. Steve yells across the room to another boy to see if he wants a packet of the product. Mrs. Thomas intervenes and takes the products, saying, “Thanks; Richard will like that.” (Richard is her boyfriend, and the students know to whom she is referring). She continues with a side comment: “If he’s still alive. He’s at XXX (name of alternative school in adjacent county omitted) today.” Marjorie responds to this comment: “Oh, it’s not bad. I used to go there. It’s Day Treatment that’s bad. They tried to send me there.” Although this incident involving the hair product is not directly related to Marjorie, she took this event and turned it into a way to bring attention back to herself. Consideration can also be given to the symbolic show of pride in her own negative behavior, by her willingness to brag about having been in a school designated as the educational alternative for troublemakers and by her choice of words “they tried to send me there,” as if she were the one who made the final decision.

The concept of masculinity was often an element that surfaced in displays of misbehavior, both minor and more serious forms of deviance. Boys often appeared to

have a need for one-upmanship, defined as the art or practice of achieving, demonstrating or assuming superiority in one's rivalry with a friend or opponent by obtaining privilege, status, status symbols, etc. The exchange between Mr. Jones and Mike (discussed in the previous chapter) can be analyzed as a display of masculinity, consistent with West and Zimmerman's (1987) conceptualization of "doing gender" through every-day interactions. In this particular incident, Mike clearly challenged the authority of a male teacher, deriding him in an attempt to "prove" his superiority. Teenage boys at this high school often "did gender" through the use of negative slurs hurled at one another (even with friendly tones); derision in their words or tone of voice when discussing another boy or elements associated with another boy; boisterous and rambunctious forms of play such as punching one another; and extremely loud voices often in the presence of girls, perhaps in an effort to be noticed. Other examples of this type of behavior include an early morning occurrence during the Fall in an elective class. The size of the class was quite large, and the students were congregated into various groups, talking during the instructional time. A group of boys, many of whom are wearing clothing that indicates they are student athletes, became particularly unruly. One of the boys was teasing another about some weekend incident, to which the first responded, vocally, "Shut up." "Or you'll do what?" the other taunted. "Or I'll fuck you up right here." This show of bravado was met by laughter and shoulder punches being thrown around the entire group of boys. In a similar incident, this same group of boys was talking during another day of instruction, when one of the boys uttered a curse word. Another mockingly said "Don't cuss, Man. This is a Christian place. You'll go to hell." The offending student replied "I don't care." "Yes, you do." "No, Man, I'll take over hell. I don't care." Again, the

group erupted into laughter. These shows of masculinity, from the taunting to the chastisement, to the assertion of not being afraid of the threat of punishment of Hell, served to reinforce the gendered expectations of dominance, assertiveness and aggressiveness among boys. These incidents can also be examined under the lens of self-concept and self-esteem, as outlined above. Specifically, these acts of misbehavior diverts attention away from their academic performance in the class, albeit fleetingly, and instead provides them with a venue to feel better about themselves. Interestingly, although I had been on the opposite side of the classroom during both of the foregoing exchanges and could clearly hear the incidents, as could the other students, the teacher simply admonished the boys to “settle down and get to work;” no follow-up was ever made with regard to being off-task, disrupting the class, or of the use of foul language in the classroom. This could be interpreted as the teacher “choosing his battles carefully,” choosing to ignore the misbehavior in the interest of keeping the peace in the classroom while at the same time recognizing it as a routine form of adolescent behavior. As the teacher later explained to me, “Boys show off for each other as much as for the girls.”

Low-achieving students may act out in class to avoid attention being drawn to the fact that they are not performing well in the class, believing that it enhances their reputation among their peers, particularly those other students who are also struggling academically. The actions which make one “look good,” however, are quite subjective, differing by subculture affiliation. Therefore, among adolescents seeking to find their niche, misbehavior may also serve as a form of self-enhancement rather than self-protection: among some subcultures, being in trouble or being seen as tough is looked

upon favorably. Thus, when these students act out, it enhances their reputation among their peers, even though this does not fit mainstream cultural ideals of desirable behavior.

Shows of bravado among the boys at the high school were a frequent occurrence. For example, in a Science class that was observed several times during the spring semester, several boys wore dirty jeans and tattered shirts. These boys clustered together in a friendship group and were routinely defiant to the lead teacher and the collaborating teacher. On one particular occasion, one of the boys, an African American, stepped on his chair to cross to the aisle, rather than walking behind the chair. The collaborating teacher, who was standing close-by with me, simply said "Please don't step on the chair." Although the boy did not look directly at the teacher, his response, said loudly enough for us and the nearest students to hear, was "Shut up. Nobody's talkin' to you. I'll step where I fuckin' want to." The teacher gave him a pointed glare and said "Watch it." Turning to me, she said, "Well, that's an improvement. He usually says it out loud."

Further evidence of this skewed form of self-enhancement is demonstrated in the example of Bradley, who bragged about receiving a referral to the office from Mr. Jones, the humanities teachers. Mr. Jones explained to me that Bradley had been misbehaving in class and that he had repeatedly ignored Mr. Jones' requests to stop misbehaving, finally calling Mr. Jones a "poopyhead." Mr. Jones wrote the required referral sheet to the administrators, telling Bradley that he was not going to allow him to call him derogatory names without any repercussion. Bradley danced around the room, laughing and showing the other students the referral upon which Mr. Jones had written that Bradley had called him a "poopyhead." Bradley said "This is great! I'm going to frame it!" In this instance, Bradley had taken an incident which would likely have had a much

different impact on a high-self-esteem student (notwithstanding the fact that it would have been highly unlikely for a high self-esteem student to engage in such behavior in the first place) and used it as a way to make himself “look good” in the eyes of his peers. This type of behavior can and does have a negative impact on teacher morale; Mr. Jones was clearly upset by the incident, shaking his hand and looking resigned, stating that he simply did not know what else to do. “What do you do with a student like that?” It was a question that several teachers asked me, in various forms, throughout the study.

From the students’ perspective, acting in the varied ways described above, they may feel a sense of empowerment in a system in which they otherwise find themselves powerless. The boys may assert their masculinity through the hurling of obscenities, or through roughhousing, or through direct defiance of authority figures, actively constructing their concept of the powerful male. Girls may also desire power and recognition, which they may attempt to get through displays of sexuality or through behaviors that get them noticed for the very reason that the behavior is “not feminine.” For those students, boys and girls alike, the misbehavior may be a plea for attention, especially among those who come from troubled backgrounds or who have a history of documented behavioral problems.

SYMBOLIC CULTURAL CAPITAL

Adolescence is viewed as a time when it is appropriate to search for a self-identity and to determine one’s values, a feat is accomplished through experimentation with a wide variety of behaviors and activities (Bartollas, 2001, citing Dryfoos, 1990:25). Within the high school, this may occur through socializing with various groups, engaging in various extracurricular activities such as athletics or club activities and through

academic accomplishments (or failures). It is during this process that the effects of labeling and social reproduction may be seen. In particular, students who come into the high school with a history of underachievement may have already lost interest in academics. They may be assigned, correctly by the school's academic guidelines, into general education classes where they begin (or continue) to see themselves as underperformers. Their underperformance, combined with the student's perception of lowered expectations of the teacher, may be compensated for by exaggerated expressions of indifference in the form of misbehavior, lack of preparedness for class, failure to complete assignments or overt rejection of authority. This, in turn, may be viewed by the educators, who have a much different value system, as a lack of cultural capital which causes a cycle of labeling and self-fulfilling prophecy to occur. The teacher may interpret the lack of motivation, poor attitude, or outright defiance of authority as a demonstration that the student hails from a background which is similarly lacking in values conducive to a good education, ultimately interacting with the student in a much different manner than he or she interacts with the student who comes to class armed with a notebook, calculator, completed assignments and a demeanor that indicates an eagerness to learn (Lareau, 2000; Lareau, 2003).

Tied to the concept of cultural capital, a particular form of dress is viewed as appropriate for students who are high-achievers or "good" students. For those groups, styles such as those seen in teen and young adult clothing stores at a local mall serves as a guide to appropriate attire, a signal that the student has a social class position that affords him or her the opportunity to purchase name-brand clothing and accessories, an indication of the likelihood of associated forms of cultural capital. Clothing which does

not conform to mainstream clothing styles, such as baggy pants and oversized sweatshirts (which can also be purchased at local malls as the “gangster” style has become more common among the white, middle-class) are still nonetheless perceived by authority figures as less desirable and indicative of a lack of cultural capital. As noted by Morris (2005:27):

Although sometimes embraced by white and middle-class young people, these styles acquire a threatening tenor of opposition for many when worn by minority youth, especially boys (citing Anderson 1990; Patillo-McCoy 1999). However, these styles may just reflect a youth identity that includes relatively innocuous resistance to adult, main-stream norms.

Thus, defiance of the official dress code (wherein specific standards are set forth) as well as the “unofficial” dress code (wherein some styles are viewed as more desirable than others) at the school may serve as a form of resistance, making a symbolic statement about the students’ perception of the rules (Morris, 2005). In line with this reasoning is the observation that students in the lower-level academic courses were routinely the ones who displayed more conspicuous styles of dress: they were often the ones who wore primarily black or shades of grey and their clothing was often tattered or wrinkled. It was also the students in these classes who tended to violate the official code: they were often admonished in the hallways to take off their hoodies and, occasionally, to pull up their pants. The girls in these classes were seen to be divided into two forms: on one hand, some of the girls in the underachieving classes wore clothing that was baggier and less suited to “feminine” ideals: sweatpants and loose-fitting tee-shirts or sweatshirts. On the other hand, some of the girls wore clothing at the opposite end of the “feminine” ideal: clothing which was form-fitting, similar to their higher-achieving peers, but often enhanced with heavier makeup and accessories, ultimately leading to a more sexualized

appearance. Students in classes which were comprised of higher-achieving students, on the other hand, tended to wear clothing that fell somewhere in between these two extremes: the girls typically wore jeans, often slashed with rips and tears from the manufacturer and form-fitted tees, which is the popular fashion style during both academic semesters. While the clothing choices of the higher-achieving girls were often still sexualized, with tight jeans and shirts, the overall effect, with less make-up and jewelry, led to a different and more mainstream “look” than the girls who wore enhanced amounts of both. These observations are on point with the work of Bettie (2002), who describes the differences in the symbolic displays of social class membership and cultural capital between working class and middle class girls, noting the fashion and makeup styles to be in opposition, indicating a rejection of the values of the opposing group. In particular, in line with social reproduction theory, the heavy makeup and sexualized clothing worn by the lower-achieving students in this school may be seen as conveying an adult-like status, while girls in the higher-achieving classes may obtain similar status through the performance of high grades and college preparatory work. Given that these conclusions were reached by this researcher over the course of two semesters, it is plausible to believe that the teachers filter their perceptions of the girls through a similar lens. Those perceptions may then impact their interactions with the students.

Similarly, boys in the lower-level courses tended to dress differently than their higher-achieving peers. While the boys who were observed to be performing well academically tended to wear clothing which appeared to be newer and more “in style,” or to wear clothing that indicated athletic affiliation (such as track pants and jackets, or simple tee-shirts with athletic logos, along with khaki cargo shorts, or preppy shoe styles

such as boat shoes), the boys in the lower-level courses tended to wear the baggier clothing and darker shades of clothing, absent any discernible logos, to wear pants that were dragging the ground and thus tattered along the hemline, and to wear tennis shoes that were untied or with brightly-colored designs on the strings, most of which are generally considered to be affiliated with the urban “gangster” look. Moreover, many of these boys appeared to be lacking in personal grooming habits, which may be interpreted by the teacher as yet another sign of a lack of cultural capital and a rejection of the middle-class value system.

Dress code violations were handled somewhat differently between boys and girls. For example, boys were routinely told to take off hats and hoodies as soon as teachers or administrators noticed the violation, but girls were often seen sporting trendy headwear such as knitted caps without any type of reprimand being issued. In these cases, it appears that headwear on girls is related to fashion choices and is allowable, but boys who wear baseball caps, plain toboggans or hoodies are violating the dress code. On the other hand, boys, particularly African Americans, were often seen with their pants sagging sometimes well below the beltline yet they were reprimanded less frequently (perhaps an indication that the educators accept this as a cultural difference) while girls who were in violation of the dress code with skirts that were too short or tops that were too low were quick to be told to cover up and/or not wear the outfit again. A sexual double-standard appears to be in operation with these examples: it is acceptable for boys to show their underwear (even if it is officially against the rules), but girls must not allow too much of their bodies to be seen. Teachers and administrators alike were quick to call the girls’ attention to dress code violations, although male teachers sometimes appeared

uncomfortable doing so. For example, on one occasion a teacher reported to an administrator that she had seen a girl nearby who was “about to fall out of her top.” The administrator responded that he had not seen the girl, and asked the teacher if she could find the student and mention it to her. The teacher responded that she thought the girl would listen better if she heard it from an administrator, to which the administrator responded “I don’t want to see that.” He repeated the request to the teacher that he would like for her to handle the matter, and the teacher agreed. Turning to me, he repeated a phrase that was said to me several times during the course of the study, by male and female teachers alike: “Boobs, bellies and butts. It’s all about the three Bs.”

Among the girls, particularly those who violate the dress code, they may be demonstrating their desire to be in control, and in some instances it may be an assertion of their sexuality, a conclusion which is in line with the statements of the educators who referenced the “Three Bs”. Particularly those in the lower-level academic courses, where the effect was sometimes highly sexualized, it may be various social beliefs operating simultaneously: they may believe that they need to dress provocatively in order to catch the attention of a boy, a common stereotype of behavior that is expected of girls. At the same time, they may not be expecting to continue their education much further; they may believe their role in life is limited, as a girlfriend or wife. Thus, their clothing choice indicates an active construction of their view of femininity and the associated need to use their body and their clothing and make-up to attract a boy. In other instances, they may simply be pushing the rules to see how far they can go before they get into trouble, as a way to signal resistance to a system which they deem to be unfair: a system which they

may believe allows some girls more flexibility in dress than others based upon their social or academic reputation at the school.

Regardless of the reasons behind the student behavior, the teachers and administrators seem to be aware of gendered behavior, often referencing it during informal discussions and the formal interviews. Whether the boys misbehaved for the benefit of gaining the attention of girls or for the benefit of out-performing other boys, and whether the girls used their fashion choices as a statement of femininity, are beyond the scope of this study. The important element for purposes of this study is the fact that displays of masculinity were often interpreted as a classic case of “boys will be boys” which impacted the teachers’ and administrators’ reactions to the misbehavior, often in the form of it being overlooked. Female misbehavior or dress code violations, on the other hand, led to admonishments by the teachers with greater attempts made to bring the girls back on-task or to persuade them to dress “appropriately” for their roles as young ladies. As noted by Sadker and Sadker (2009) much of the sexist behavior exhibited by teachers is not readily apparent. For example, in many classes at this school, girls who misbehaved, particularly by talking during the teachers’ instruction time or by talking back to the teacher, were reprimanded as frequently as the boys, which at first glance would not appear sexist at all. Yet, when considering the number of events by both boys and girls that might have warranted a reprimand, the girls appeared to receive admonishments sooner and more often than boys. And, as noted by Sadker and Sadker (2009), the “hidden lesson” reinforces the dominance of boys and leads to a sense of entitlement to power over girls by boys. Although the form differs from other research (here the girls received the teachers’ attention, while Sadker and Sadker (2009) argue that

boys become the focus of attention), the implicit statement is the same: boys have more freedom of personal expression, while girls need to be guided and monitored more closely. When boys did become the focus of the teachers' attention, it was typically in response to a series of repeated misbehaviors rather than a single event, where to ignore the misbehavior would have undermined the teacher's position of power in the classroom. It was often the case that when misbehavior occurred in the lower-level academic classes, the misbehavior came mostly (but not solely) from the boys, which then led to the teachers' attention being directed more specifically at the boys. Similarly, Einarsson and Granstrom (2002) note differences between the amount of attention given to boys and to girls, noting that female teachers always give more attention to boys, but male teachers at the high school level give more attention to girls. The present research, however, did not note any perceived differences based upon the gender of the teacher. Some teachers seemed hesitant to admonish girls about the "Three B's," but this hesitancy is likely a reflection of societal discomfort with speaking to children about sexuality, rather than a desire to actually avoid the issue. In other instances, the issue of determining whether clothing was appropriate or a violation of the dress code may also be a reflection of the influence of the mass media: options that are seen as "stylish" did not receive the same level of scrutiny as options that were seen as "sexy." At the same time, consideration of which group of girls tended to wear certain styles of clothing may have also impacted the decision to discipline. For example, Bettie (2002) notes that clothing choices (and makeup) reflect social class boundaries and are indicative of cultural capital. Working class girls may wear more suggestive clothing (leading to

higher levels of scrutiny) than middle class girls who find other more socially acceptable means of gaining adult attention and positive recognition.

Although teachers varied in their approach to behavior management in the classroom, in many classrooms the elements of cultural capital and gender expectations operated simultaneously to play a role in teachers' and administrators' perception of individual students, ultimately impacting how the authority figures responded to acts of misbehavior. At the same time, the students' personality and their construction of education as important or unimportant, in conjunction with their understanding and interpretation of the teachers' personality, claim to authority and the style of discipline, influenced the behavior of individual students and within groups of students. The end result is a complex process of misbehavior and punishment which for some students and teachers become a repetitive process.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TEACHERS' VIEWPOINT

The teachers at Bramble County High School appear devoted to their careers as educators. This does not mean, however, that every teacher employs the same teaching methods nor are they in agreement with what constitutes proper classroom management. This chapter will discuss the differing classroom management techniques employed by the various teachers who participated in this study and explore the reasons that teachers give to explain the problems they encounter. This chapter will also focus on teachers' reactions to general forms of misbehavior at the school based upon comments made by the teacher in daily conversations and during the formal interview process. Emphasis will be placed on the teachers' perceptions and reactions, not on the individual students or specific instances of misbehavior. Next, the connection between teachers and parents will be explored, as most teachers had strong feelings regarding this issue specifically with regard to parents who present a problem because they are indifferent and parents who present a problem because they are over-involved. Finally, the teachers' perceptions of the handling of misbehavior at the school-wide level can be discussed, as this was an issue which emerged in almost all interviews and in many daily conversations.

The teachers at Bramble County High School are divided on how to best manage adolescent misbehavior, particularly that which is related to general forms of mischief and Code of Conduct violations such as dress code violations, use of technology violations, personal displays of affection and foul language. They are somewhat in disagreement how to manage mid-level violations such as tobacco violations, disrespectful tones and blatant defiance of authority. Serious violations such as fighting

are handled swiftly and consistently. Fortunately for this high school, extremely serious violations which would necessitate the involvement of legal authorities are exceedingly rare, although the school does have a Resource Officer available should the need arise.

As this research project got underway, it became apparent that similar themes regarding the disciplinary process were emerging based upon the observations and daily small-talk with the participating teachers. Specifically, the teachers were utilizing a variety of approaches to try to manage misbehaving students, but their reasons for their processes varied and were based upon the emphasis they placed on discipline, academics, and relationship-building. More importantly, they were making efforts to keep the students in the classrooms rather than sending them out for punishment. Second, the teachers felt very strongly about attitudes (of both students and parents); their perception of those attitudes impacted their decision-making process. In particular, lack of motivation among the student body was a concern, as was parental involvement. The teachers emphasized that over-involvement by the parent had the potential to be just as detrimental as under-involvement. Third, the teachers at this school were aware that some of their students came from undesirable home conditions, and those conditions were sometimes seen as a contributing factor to misbehavior which most teachers tried to consider when deciding how or when to discipline. Fourth, for many teachers, their lack of belief in the efficacy of the school's in-school suspension program impacted their willingness to give referrals to misbehaving students.

The teachers are found to vary their classroom behavior management styles based upon their conceptualization of what it means to be a "good" teacher. Some demand strict compliance to the rules; others take a more democratic approach, allowing for

negotiation between the student and the teacher. At the same time, some teachers approach the student-teacher relationship with firm boundaries and a more impersonal manner, while others make concerted efforts to develop rapport with the student and understand the student as an individual. The most effective classrooms (with respect to behavior management) are those with very specific guidelines on behavior which are consistently and immediately enforced when rules are broken, regardless of the teacher's emphasis on rapport. The least effective approach is negotiation without rapport (which was seen to sometimes break down, leading to ultimatums being issued by the teacher which were then disregarded by the students). While some teachers manage to control their classes with a combination approach of negotiation and relationship building, even in those classes minor rule infractions were witnessed regularly. However, some amount of deviance from the rules is normal and is generally regarded as part of routine child and adolescent behavior, a rite of passage asserting one's growing independence.

Although this school is quite large, the teachers know one another well and are often aware of strategies being used by one another as efforts to control misbehavior are a frequent topic of conversation. The teachers also sometimes share stories with one another of events in their classrooms. Labeling by the teachers is heard in conversations, but it is done in very general terms and is not interpreted (for purposes of this research project) as any intentional form of bias. The categories sometimes referenced in conversations with teachers included: (1) Athletes or otherwise "involved" students, (2) Honors Students, (3) Mean Girls, (4) Farm Kids, (5) Special Education Students, (6) General Students and (6) Troublemakers. Each of these categories will be mentioned in the following discussion, not as distinct groups for purposes of analysis, but placed in

appropriate context as they surfaced during the observations and interviews. While the teachers appear to see the students as falling into one, or sometimes more, of the above groups, when those groups are referenced it is done in consideration of trends within a group as a whole, rather than a label placed upon any individual student.

APPROACHES TO DISCIPLINE

Mr. Harrellson and Mr. Muncie team-teach one of the school's elective classes. They have collaborated for many years, although their approach to teaching is quite different. While Mr. Muncie engages students primarily through the use of textbook material and workbooks, Mr. Harrellson conducts his portion of the class primarily through a lecture-oriented style. Similarly, their classroom management techniques differ somewhat. Mr. Muncie has a more relaxed and friendly approach with the students, while Mr. Harrellson can best be described as "all business." This business-like atmosphere is present during the many times this elective class was observed, as well as the multiple occasions he was observed on hall-monitoring duty. His physical stance matches his personality, standing almost at attention as he hovers near his doorway watching the students make their way through the hall between classes. He is very clear during his discussions with me, both informal and formal, that he believes the teachers who do not strictly adhere to the rules are doing a disservice to both themselves and the students. As he explained to me on my first visit to his class: "Without consequences, there's no incentive to behave." He also explained his personal method for discipline: "The first time they are off task, they are given a warning. The second time, they stand in the corner at the back of the room, at attention, for five minutes. The third time, they are referred to an administrator." He says that some of the students, when given the referral,

will ask him if they can just stand in the back of the room again, but that he tells them they can't. "I tell them, you're not going to keep standing there two, three or four times. You had a chance." This "Law and Order" approach to classroom management is one of the strictest methods observed during the course of this research project, but his classroom was also one of the most well-behaved. This is especially striking, given that this class is not a required course and many of the students chose this elective over other options. Nonetheless, he estimates that one-third of the class was assigned to it by a guidance counselor rather than choosing it for themselves; those students are often part of the troubled group of students who either have behavior problems or who are lagging academically. Although one might expect that students assigned to this rigorous elective would misbehave as a result, this problem was never observed. Students occasionally placed their heads on their desks and did not actively participate in class, but they did not misbehave in the manner that was observed in several other classrooms throughout the school. Their disinterest was typically ignored, with Mr. Harrellson explaining to me that if it were a student who routinely did not engage, he or she would be sent to ABC, but for the occasional disinterested student, it was his opinion that the lack of participation would eventually be reflected in poor grades in the class. As proof of this point, he explained that one student had been told to report to ABC on a daily basis rather than reporting to class. The student had refused to do any work, and Mr. Harrellson said he had told the boy that his continual resistance to classwork would not be tolerated. He was given the choice of going to ABC and failing the class, or making the decision to participate in class. The student chose the former, and he would be receiving a failing grade at the end of the term. Mr. Harrellson believes that his method of classroom

management can serve as a “wake-up call” to the realities of the real world. Since many of the students in his class are Freshman, he sees his class as a way to “teach the students how to be successful in high school in general, rather than just being successful in this class.”

Mr. Harrellson is quite critical of teachers at the school whom he says are “picking their battles.” For example, he explains that other teachers have told him that they don’t really care about minor Code violations as long as they are not acting up and causing a disturbance. Wearing caps or hoodies would be an example of the type of behavior that some teachers tolerate, much to his chagrin. In particular, he mentions one teacher who has basically given up trying to enforce any sense of order in her classroom. “She’s told me, ‘the ones who want to pay attention can, and the others I’m just not going to worry about.’ I’m just not sure why teachers don’t use the tools that have been given to them.” By this, he explains that he means the Code of Conduct and the disciplinary consequences that are outlined within the Code. In his opinion, “It lowers the students’ appreciation for the rules in general when they know they can get away with it.” As if to make his point, he mentions the issue of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), stating that he believes that it is very much over-diagnosed. “In one class, I have ten or eleven students who have the diagnosis. Based on that, I should be given a Special Education Collaborator, but I’ve never asked for one or needed one. The kids know the expectations in the class apply to everyone, ADHD or not.” He says that it is his opinion that “Parents who can afford to will send their kids to parochial or private school to avoid the behavior problems at public schools. Those schools have a waiting

list, with the threat of expulsion if they don't behave. At the public schools, they know they can get away with it."

Mrs. Carmichael, a Science teacher, is similarly critical of teachers who do not consistently enforce the school rules. A teacher for eleven years, she works with all levels of academic ability from Honors students to Special Education. For her, consistency is the key ingredient to success. When asked about how she felt about the enforcement of rules at BCHS, she responded:

It is not consistent. There's the cell phones -- some teachers don't keep on them about that at all. And the Ipods, too. Some teachers take them, some don't. The official policy is that they can be used in the halls only. But the teachers just aren't consistent about enforcing it in the classrooms. Some let them listen to their music. But here in my class, just recently, I caught two cheating on their phones on a test. All they have to do is type in "What is a . . . whatever" and the answer will pop up for them. And they watch where you are in the classroom, so they know right when they can put it in their lap and type without you seeing them. You have to watch them all the time for stuff like that.

She goes on to explain that although she feels as if she has to deal with misbehavior regardless of which academic level she is working with, the problems associated with Honors classes and General Education classes differ:

With the Honors classes, in any given 50 minute class, probably about ten minutes is spent on misbehavior. But even then the things I have to deal with are different for those classes. Sometimes they are discussing problems with one another, talking when they shouldn't be, or they are working on another subject outside of science, they are talking, or just *doing* something else. With the general classes, probably about 30 minutes out of 50, I'm dealing with behavior issues. Their problems are different. They talk back, argue with you, criticizing you personally, just *trying* to waste time to avoid doing the work. And they'll banter with you. If I say something to them, it just goes back and forth.

She believes that about ten percent of students are the routinely defiant students. She, like other teachers participating in this project, believes that a significant amount of their time is devoted to controlling the behavior of a certain few students which is a disservice

to the many students who are not misbehaving. This concern is documented in the literature wherein Monroe (2005, citing Gouldner 1978) notes that it has been long settled in the academic literature that teachers often approach classes with high numbers of low-income or African American students with an emphasis on controlling behaviors, with their focus most pronounced when working with low-ability and boys. This appears to be occurring at Bramble County High School and it is a concern that the school has addressed through the implementation of the PRAISE monitoring and behavioral management system. Mrs. Carmichael, along with several other teachers, utilizes the school's intervention system (described below) so that she can focus on teaching the academic material to the students who are truly interested in learning.

I LOVE the PRAISE system They will come and talk to the kid, and that saves me time. I can do what I get paid to do, which is teach, rather than having to spend more of my time on the problem kids.

Mr. Young is the lead teacher in charge of the PRAISE system. His primary job is to maintain contact with a select group of students who are routinely struggling in school, both academically and behaviorally. The school utilizes this monitoring system in an effort to divert misbehavior in its early stages and to counsel the students with behavioral problems by teaching the students coping strategies and ways to manage their anger, discontent or dissatisfaction with school. Mr. Young and the paraeducators who work with him provide an atmosphere of understanding for troubled students, a safe place where they may go to vent their frustrations and unwind. They provide positive reinforcement for good behavior while still bringing the students' attention to the consequences of negative behavior. He uses the following example as an illustration of their methods:

I'll see a kid with a hat on, and I'll call them out and tell them to take it off. And then the next day, they've got the hat on and I tell them again, and they mumble about it, but then the next day, I'll see them and it's off, and I comment on that, too. I give them a Jolly Rancher. I carry a pocket full of Jolly Ranchers, and they remember that. It lets them know we're here for them, even if it just a piece of candy. It's still a reward for following the rules.

Mr. Young's opinion toward classroom management seems to lie on the midpoint of the continuum between strict compliance to the rules and lax enforcement. He is critical of teachers who do not provide the necessary consequences for misbehavior, but at the same time, he sees the benefit in understanding the myriad reasons for misbehavior which may necessitate a case-by-case decision making process. He also looks at the behavioral problems faced by teachers today as a "sign of the times":

The older model of education was that it was the teacher's job to *teach*, not to control behavior. Behavior control was not such an issue in years past, because the level of respect was higher, so the teacher was taught that her role was to teach the subject. Those teachers don't want to have to focus on behavior modification . . . but because of the change in students, the new model has to be "Behavior First" then you can teach. You can't teach if the class is out of control. That's where PRAISE comes in.

He goes on to state that he sees this is a general trend in society, that students have become more disrespectful and less willing to work than students of previous generations (which is reiterated by **every** teacher who participated in this study), but he also stresses that he cannot explain why this has occurred.

Part of his teaching philosophy is the belief in the importance of connecting with students, either through learning their names or at the very least making eye contact with them.

We have teachers here, a few, who never make eye contact with the kids. They just see their job as to teach. But you've got to connect with the kids, make them feel like they're noticed, that you know who they are. Because when they think you know who they are, they are going to behave better. I'll see a kid in the hall

that I know has had some problems, and I'll say "Hey, how're you doing, how's your grades?" And they'll tell me their grades are good, and I'll say, 'I'm going to check on them.' And then I have to go ask somebody who the kid is, but I'll print out his grade report and have it in my hand with all my other reports, so next time he walks past me, I'll hold it up and say 'I got your grades.' And they'll smile. They know somebody cares. You'd be surprised how many of the kids here don't have anyone who cares.

He explains that a psychologist came to the school last year and did a survey on bullying which involved a network analysis of how many people each child had in their lives or at the school who they felt like they could talk to if they had a problem. Five percent of students at BCHS reported that they had no one to talk to.

Five percent is about 90 students at the school. Can you imagine that? Ninety kids walking down these halls every day who have absolutely no one to turn to. I'm thinking Columbine, just a tragedy waiting to happen.

He explains that he believes most of the teachers at the school are aware of these types of issues, but that, nonetheless:

A few don't make much of an effort to connect with the students. That's all they want to do: Teach. And I try to tell them: If you don't have that connection with the student, it's not going to work.

Giving consideration to Mr. Young's observation that some teachers are focused almost solely on academics, as opposed to behavior modification efforts or rapport-building, it should be noted that this perception of the role of the teacher accurately summarizes a policy shift that has been seen throughout the United States over the past several decades. Historically, behavior was regulated by the family, while the public education system focused on the intellectual development of the child. Teacher-training programs emphasized various methods to engage students in the academic material, while de-emphasizing the social aspects of teaching. Today, those programs emphasize the importance of rapport-building and establishing a connection with the student as a way to

promote higher academic performance. For teachers who have been in the educational field for many years, this change may be harder to accept. Mr. Young notes there have been times he has advised a teacher, at her request, on how to handle a particular class better, only to see the teacher close up and turn away from his advice.

They'll say, 'Well, I don't really have time for that. We'll just try to make it through the school year the way it is.' And they don't want to try something new. Anytime you try a new approach, it's going to seem a bit chaotic at the beginning because you're not used to doing it that way. Sometimes it's just easier to go with the enemy you know than the enemy you don't know.

Notwithstanding Mr. Young's mention of those teachers who fail to make a personal connection with students, the teachers who participated in this project did not seem to have this problem. Many of the teachers made mention of student home life as having a role in academic outcome and of the desire to see all of their students succeed. This does not mean, however, that they were in agreement on how to best go about achieving that success, or even that they felt that each student *would* be successful, regardless of his or her potential. Various reasons were given by the teachers in an effort to account for this discrepancy between *potential* and *actual* outcome, including failure to complete assigned work, lack of motivation, lack of parental support, significant family stressors, working at a job and a sense of entitlement. Also included in the reasons for poor academic performance were factors which often led to the student being placed in the In-School Suspension area such as tardiness and truancy, defiance of authority, disrespect toward other students or adults, fighting, etc. The more time students spend outside the classroom, the greater the risk of failure. Because of this known risk, some teachers at the school choose to ignore small rule violations and to accept some level of

disrespect and defiance in the classroom in an effort to keep the students in the classroom environment.

Mrs. Caudill, a Math teacher who is relatively new to the teaching profession, addresses discipline with a more relaxed standard. Nonetheless, her classroom, which was observed on multiple occasions, seldom has any major forms of misbehavior. While she is willing to negotiate with her students, this is done on a case-by-case basis, as she explains that she simply does not agree with the “zero tolerance” policies adopted by many schools. Sometimes students need a referral; other times they need a second chance. She goes on to explain that with some students,

[G]iving them a referral will just make them angry, and then that student will cooperate even less. Really, sometimes, I just want them to cooperate and not do certain things. So, I’ll make a deal with them. If you can just be quiet for the next ten minutes, I won’t give you a referral. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.

Although the students may know they can expect a “second chance” with this teacher, the observation portion of this project provided an explanation as to why students did not routinely take advantage of this teacher and her classroom management strategies. Mrs. Caudill provided positive feedback and encouragement to every student in the class, with multiple occasions of praises being subtly heaped upon students, even without it being apparent to the casual observer. For example, as the students engaged in solving problems aloud or on the board, Mrs. Caudill would say things such as “I like your thought process there” or “That’s a good way to tackle that problem.” Similarly, when they were caught behaving well, those instances were called to attention as well. “Thank you for getting your work out so quickly” or “I appreciate that you are working quietly today.” Students were given positive feedback whether it concerned academics or

behavior, and – as predicted by the PRAISE coordinator – the positive reinforcement served as a disincentive toward misbehavior. She goes on to lament the net result of student misbehavior at the school-wide level, which points to her willingness to see the potential good in every student:

Students have lost freedoms they used to have because of the actions of a few. There's a general atmosphere of not trusting the students. You have to assume all of them may turn out to be bad kids. And that isn't actually the case at all.

Mrs. Masters has been teaching English courses at BCHS for eight years.

Throughout the research project, students were observed to interact with Mrs. Masters in a very relaxed manner, often chatting informally with her near her desk at the end of class periods when they had completed the assigned work and sometimes staying after the bell rang to finish a conversation. She has an open, friendly demeanor which opens the door for communication between student and educator. Nonetheless, her method of classroom management is on the opposite end of the discipline continuum from the strict methods employed by teachers such as Mr. Harrellson; however, like him, she finds that she rarely needs to call on the behavior management services of the PRAISE program.

She explains her discipline philosophy in the following way:

I'm more lenient to start with, I let them speak out and say what's on their mind, and I let kids be kids. And because of that, I don't have a lot of problems. Kids like my class. But if there is one that pushes me to my limit, and steps over the line, then that's another story. But if they are just wearing a hat, or listening to music, and he's still doing the work, then I don't care. I see the positive in what they are trying to do, that they are doing the work. The dress code, or the phone, that just doesn't matter as long as the work is getting done. And if there's downtime, we get done early or students finish more quickly than others, I'll let them use their phones or their Ipods then, too, or if they want to work on material for another class, I'll let them.

Like Mrs. Caudill, she provides positive reinforcement for prompt answers and being on task. At times, her tone with students borders on sarcastic as she employs this method to chastise them when they are misbehaving. This method appears successful as most students would typically comply with her requests to stay on task, to get back to work, to settle down, etc. after one (or sometimes two) admonishments. At the same time, however, the admonishments carried a note of humor, providing the students with the overall feeling that Mrs. Masters was there to help them rather than to punish them. For example, Marjorie, a talkative student who was observed in multiple classes, was made to settle down in Mrs. Masters' class through her power of persuasion.

Marjorie just wanted attention. But I discussed the problem with her using humor, I joked with her about her loudness, and that seemed to help.

The situation of Marjorie, who was known by many teachers to be loud and boisterous and often off-task, provides an excellent example for purposes of giving consideration to the importance of the students' perceptions of the teachers and how that perception impacts their willingness to cooperate. In particular, Mrs. Thomas had significant problems curtailing Marjorie's talkativeness during class, but Mrs. Masters appeared to have more success. The lack of long term effectiveness to control Marjorie's behavior by Mrs. Thomas is associated with academic literature which looks at the relationship between the students' perception of the legitimacy of the teacher's authority and the ability to control misbehavior. Specifically, Smetana and Bitz (1996, cited by Gregory and Weinstein, 2008:458) found that belief in the legitimacy of teachers' authority over the rules was associated with lower rates of misbehavior. While Gregory and Weinstein's research was directed toward understanding disciplinary gaps between

whites and minorities, the same factors which lead an African American student to accept the legitimacy of the teacher's authority could be extended to include other groups as well. For example, while Gregory and Weinstein point out that "[E]thnographic researchers have found that teachers who communicate both warmth and demandingness are exemplary instructors of African American children" (2008:458, citing Ladson-Billings, 1994), there is no reason to believe those same characteristics do not work well with children in general. Trust becomes a central element of the acceptance of a teacher's authority as legitimate (Gregory and Weinstein, 2008; Gregory and Ripski, 2008) :

More important for cooperation than the actual disciplinary practice in the classroom (e.g., time-out, notes home, referral to the office) may be whether the teacher prevents violations of classroom rules via establishing a strong relationship (Gregory and Ripski, 2008:339).

Thus, the need for students like Marjorie to accept the legitimacy of the teachers' authority, she first must feel as if she can trust the teachers' judgment. Such trust is developed over time through the course of interaction and through the efforts of the teacher to make Marjorie feel as if the teacher is concerned about her as a person rather than just as a student in the class. Such a connection between the acceptance of the legitimacy of authority and trust helps to explain why teachers such as Mrs. Thomas have more difficulty managing Marjorie, or students with similar behaviors, than Mrs. Masters, who indicated that she had dealt specifically with Marjorie through the use of humor, but who also demonstrated, over the course of the observations, that she took a genuine interest in her students as individuals (as documented herein) and made efforts to make sure they knew they could turn to her if they had a problem. Support for this conclusion is further provided by Gregory and Ripski (2008), who note that students were

found to be more or less defiant or cooperative with some teachers than with others, an effect which was correlated with their perception of teacher caring and teacher expectations. It is also worth noting that such evidence is contrary to past research on resistance, which assumed that students adopt a general attitude of resistance which carries across classrooms (Giroux, 1983, cited by Gregory and Weinstein, 2008:459).

While Mrs. Masters employs sarcasm and humor to connect with her English students, Mrs. Black, also an English teacher, utilizes another approach. She employs a policy that she refers to as the “Three Rs: Rapport, Rigor and Relevance.” Although students were observed on infrequent occasions sleeping in her class, rarely was any overt misbehavior witnessed. Even on those rare occasions, it occurred as minor violations such as talking between a couple of students during lecture. Never was any boisterous activity seen except when students first arrived at class and were spending the first couple of minutes settling into the new class. In those instances, the students were always on-task within a very reasonable amount of time. Mrs. Black’s no-nonsense approach to classroom management appeared to be very effective at discouraging misbehavior, just as her teaching method, which involved a significant amount of emotional expression and body language, drew them into the academic material. She explained to me that she rarely needed to write a referral to the office and that she rarely had discipline problems in the classroom which was confirmed during the observation period. She attributed this to the following strategies:

I have good rapport with the students. I’m fair and consistent. The class is structured: I prepare and plan out each day. I start that from Day One in the class. Discipline problems happen when kids have too much free time, so I make sure they don’t have it. I don’t see them as a friend, but most kids like me. I try to be mindful if I have to reprimand them. I try to be calm and show respect to them. I address the behavior and move on. And five minutes later, I can talk to

them again and they won't be mad. It's what I call the three Rs: Rapport, Rigor and Relevance. Rigor, you've got to keep up the pace, and relevance, they have to see the relevance of what you're teaching them.

In summary, the teachers at Bramble County High School appear to be broken into two primary camps concerning how to effectively manage a classroom. On one side are those that require strict compliance to the rules; on the other are the teachers who are willing to negotiate with students in order to achieve classroom order. Some teachers place a great deal of emphasis on relationship building, while a few made very little mention of efforts to build strong rapport. Thus, four distinct styles emerge: strict disciplinarians, with or without an emphasis on rapport; and negotiators, with or without an emphasis on rapport. Most of the teachers who participated in the interview portion of this project discussed and defended their reasons for employing their primary method in the classroom. It is the conclusion of this researcher that the more effective method when working with misbehaving adolescents is the firmer approach to discipline. Based upon classroom observations, the teachers who attempted to negotiate, threaten or cajole the students into compliance were the teachers who suffered the most frustrations, had the most students who were out of control, and who had higher stress levels as a result. Although Mrs. Masters and Mrs. Caudill were willing to negotiate with students, they *did not* make repeated threats to write a referral, to call on the services of PRAISE or to assign detention. Their willingness to try to connect with the students on a personal level, coupled with their use of positive reinforcement for academic efforts and good behavior, provided the students with a sense of fulfillment within the class and served as a deterrent to repeated poor behavior. Thus, although they negotiated with the students, often allowing small rule infractions, the students (with rare exception) maintained

enough respect for their authority to continue to behave responsibly in the class and not take advantage of their methods. This is a difficult feat to accomplish when working with adolescents, and it is a problem that can be exacerbated when students suffer a lack of motivation or from complications of parental involvement, usually too little, but on some occasions too much. Both of these problems, along with the associated complications of poverty, will now be turned to for further consideration.

LACK OF MOTIVATION

A teacher's response to student misbehavior is related to his or her understanding of the student. Typically, this type of statement is interpreted to mean whether the student is generally known to be a "good" student or a "troublemaker." However, this research project indicates that the teacher's understanding of the student goes much deeper than superficial labeling. Teachers at this school routinely talked about students who lacked motivation, students who had significant family stressors such as impoverishment and students whose parents were under (or over)-involved in the educational process. Lack of motivation was a concern expressed by most of the teachers during the interview process, and it was often tied to their belief that an almost-tangible shift in the general attitude toward the educational process had occurred over the past decade. The belief that "something has changed" in the students as well as among their parents appears to play a significant role in how teachers interpret misbehavior and in the way they respond to it. For this reason, this section will give voice to the many teachers who echoed this sentiment.

Mrs. Black, an English teacher, spoke at length of her sense of a change in the atmosphere within the classroom environment. She placed part of the blame on recent policy changes:

There is a lack of appreciation for education, and not just at this school. Overall, there is a feeling of apathy. They don't see education as the one thing that would make a difference in their lives. They don't see the value in it. In our society today, there is a pushing of the tests. But the kids get tired and bored with that. It becomes a vicious cycle. We're losing kids who would maybe want to read about things, and think about the material, but there's just not time allowed to do those things because we have to be focused on getting the material covered and moving on to the next thing in order for the kids to succeed on the tests . . . We are sacrificing depth for breadth, doing things as a shallow attempt to get them through the material. The teachers are expected to produce, but they can't teach the critical thinking skills. So, we throw all this at the kids, and they can't process it, so they just give up. There's a lack of motivation. If I assign homework, it doesn't get done. They just don't try. They don't care. They don't see the value in it.

Mrs. Masters provides a similar argument, stating:

In the last decade, there has been a significant shift in apathy. When I began teaching, with a little encouragement, I could get work out of all the students. They could see the light at the end of the tunnel, and they were willing to work to reach it. Now, a significant number of students just won't do any work.

She says they also resist forming a relationship with the teachers that would help them want to work. "There is this attitude that they should just pass the course no matter what." When asked about the biggest problems that she sees on a regular basis, she says without hesitation, "defiance."

They just refuse to do the work. And then they get angry over getting a bad grade after they've refused to do the assignments. They will say to me, I didn't want to do it, I didn't like the book, I didn't understand it. And that's not a reason to not do the work. Then to their parents, or to the administrators, they will say, the teacher doesn't like me, she wouldn't help me, she didn't give it to me.

In a similar vein, Mrs. Osborne makes reference to the problem of low motivation. In her opinion, the problem increases as the school year progresses. Once a

student becomes aware that he or she is failing, they are even less likely then to make an effort to improve because they know it is too late to pass the class. At that point, “It doesn’t matter to them if they act up because they know they are going to fail the class no matter what.” Thus, intervention and management of behavior problems are issues that need to be addressed as soon as possible with the start of each new school year. She credits teachers who enforce discipline with having better outcomes with their students. She names one teacher in particular, stating that this teacher “[s]ets out expectations and the kids are not given a choice, they get no second chance at misbehavior.” In her opinion, this is a very effective way of maintaining order in the classroom, and it is a model that Mrs. Osborne attempts to follow in her own classroom.

Mrs. Thomas, a teacher who would be placed on the more lenient side of discipline, explains that she gives her students more than one chance before giving them a referral. “Three times and you’re out” is the policy that she strives to implement, but she feels that students tend to take advantage of that policy. Sometimes, she explains, she even feels as if they are mocking her classroom management methods. “I’ll write them up, send them out, and then they still act that way. I just don’t understand it.” This is primarily the case, she explains, in the General Education classes. Teaching both Honors Math and General Math courses provides her with an opportunity to compare the behavior of students. Similar to the comments made by Mrs. Carmichael, the Science teacher, she states that for the general education classes or those that collaborate with Special Education services, the attitude is different. They will curse, act out and simply refuse to work.

They’ll say: Give me a zero. Go ahead and suspend me. I don’t care. And then you call the parents to try to talk to them, and some of them are downright ugly.

And I'm not saying they are all like that. Some are sweet as can be, and they are just as exasperated with their kid as we are. They are looking for help from the school.

At the same time, however, she explains that she doesn't have a lot of problems out of Honors Classes. She equates this with a more stable and supportive home atmosphere.

"Parent involvement makes a big difference between the Honors classes and the others."

When asked why she thinks the kids in the general classes behave so poorly, she says:

I just see a lot of apathy in these students. And I think maybe it's what they are going through at home. Some of them are dealing with no food on the table, some of them are dealing with Mom's new boyfriend. There's just a lot of things that go on outside this classroom that gets brought into the school.

This sentiment toward the importance of parental involvement, and the role the parents play in motivating their children, is echoed by Mrs. Carmichael:

I think there's a difference with parental involvement between those two groups of students and that makes a difference in their behavior. Parental involvement and their family life is something that we just don't have any control over. We just have to work with what we're given. Students who see a future for themselves are generally pretty good students.

Regarding the problem of low motivation and the misbehavior that can result when students are not intrinsically motivated to succeed in school, the teachers – regardless of which classroom management strategies he or she employs – appear to be in full agreement that motivation levels have changed during the past decade. They are seeking to find explanations for the problem of low motivation, and the reasons they have provided are myriad: explanations such as advances in technology that lead students into expecting continual instant gratification; placing the blame on the growing rate of overwhelmed single parents; the complexities of poverty; holding jobs outside school or the suspicion of drug usage. Regardless of the reasons the teachers give to explain the

low motivation among students, they are all in agreement that this *is* a serious problem and that it is tied to behavior problems within the classroom. They are also in agreement that they feel powerless to change the situation, which is especially true when they see it as being tied to the home environment which is beyond their control.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

As documented above, many teachers commented on the importance of parental involvement and support for their children during the high school years. Parental involvement, however, can be a two-way street, with some parents being completely detached from the school and providing little to no support while others hover nearby, figuratively looking over the shoulders of their children and the teachers. Lareau, in *Home Advantage* (2000), likewise documents similar patterns of interaction between parents and the educational system. Not surprisingly, the parents who are under-involved are the parents of the students who were often observed misbehaving at the high school. Interestingly, however, the students of some over-involved parents exhibited behaviors that were just as negative as their unsupervised peers.

Mrs. Osborne and Mrs. Carmichael were among the first teachers in the study to bring this problem to the surface. In one Science section, a white girl, Heather, was observed on many occasions to be out of her seat, talking during class, texting during class, copying from worksheets of other students and generally engaging in other undesirable classroom behavior, such as sitting on or lying across the table. Mrs. Carmichael explained that in her opinion Heather really should be sent to the In-School Suspension room on a regular basis, but that the teachers at the school had generally learned not to give Heather referrals to the office. The teachers knew that when Heather

got in trouble, she would report to her father that she was being treated unfairly, which would prompt the father to call the school to complain about his daughter's punishment and threaten possible legal action if the teachers failed to stop "picking on her." Thus, Heather was known to be a troublemaker, but the teachers were seemingly powerless to deal with the situation.

If the situation with Heather were an isolated incident, this issue would be irrelevant. Unfortunately, discussions with teachers throughout the study indicated that parental questioning of the authority of the teacher or of the administrators was a common problem at this school. Moreover, several teachers indicated that they felt the administrators often acquiesced to the demands of the parents, which further undermined their authority. One teacher, who requested that even a pseudonym not be used, explained that for her students "one parent had ruined it for everyone." She recounted the following surprising contact with one parent:

I had told the kids that I would offer extra credit for coming out and supporting the school. All they had to do was find me at the game, and come up and say hi. I had a sheet that I was carrying around for them to sign so that I would remember who was there. And for that, they would get two extra credit points. One student decided not to come to the game. Instead, this student decided to spend the time shadowing a professional. Other students had also decided not to come. Some decided they wanted to go to their jobs because they wanted to earn money. But this one student's mom called and said he should get the points, too, because he had done something academic, shadowing the professional. I told her no, just like I had told the ones who had asked if they could get the points even if they had to go to their jobs. I told her the point was that I was trying to increase school spirit. But she became very upset over these two points, and called the administration. In the end, I was told to give this student the two points. It was ONLY two points. But I don't give extra credit for any reason anymore after that incident.

One case in point with respect to parents who are over-involved arose during the Spring semester of this project when one of the teachers at Bramble County High School

found herself the subject of scrutiny in the local newspaper, courtesy of a Letter to the Editor penned by an irate mother. In this specific case, the teacher explained to me that the woman's son was failing her class, to the point that it would simply be impossible for him to pass the course at that point in time. His current grade was hovering in the range of 20%, well below the required passing percentage, and even if he suddenly put forth every possible effort and earned an A on every remaining assignment, the work would not be sufficiently weighted to pull his year-long grade up to the point that he could earn a passing score. This was a student who repeatedly refused to complete assignments, and he had a very poor academic record overall. His grades in her class for the first three grading periods of the year had been a 62%, a 21% and a 22%, respectively. The teacher explained to me that she had sent emails to the parent during the course of the school year, advising her of her son's failure. Additionally, grade reports were issued on a regular basis and the parent was notified through that formality as well. The student had recently suffered a medical injury which would necessitate surgery and at least one full week out of school. The student had told his teacher that his mother wanted him to get the work that he would be missing, so that he could complete it at home during his convalescence. The teacher of this course decided not to comply with the request, explaining to the student that it would not make any difference to his grade. The mother, upon hearing this teacher's reply, sent a very irate email to the teacher, which was shared with this researcher with the promise of confidentiality. The email was written in a scathing tone, telling the teacher in no uncertain terms that it was "teachers like her" who made this high school such a bad school; that she was uncaring and was responsible for her son's failure. Within a week of receiving the email, a Letter to the Editor appeared in

the local paper, naming this teacher specifically, causing public embarrassment to the teacher and the potential of a damaged reputation in the community. Upon the advice of the administration, no public response was made to the letter. While it can be argued that the teacher should have given the student the assignments to complete at home, with the hope that some learning might occur in the process, the reasons for the teacher's refusal can be understood in light of the circumstances. This was a student who had made little effort to pass the course all year long; his mother had been uninterested in the problem until near the end of the year when it became apparent that failure was a distinct possibility; gathering the work assignments into a packet to send home, which the teacher had every reason to believe would be ignored, would take up some of her instructional time that could be spent on students interested in the learning process; and finally, grading the work, even if it were done, would have been futile because even completely accurate work (for one week) would not have significantly raised his grade. The teacher saw this as a lose-lose situation: the student was not going to pass, and her time would be wasted in gathering the material and grading it. This parent, however, was unwilling to accept the reality of her son's prior decisions to refuse to do the class work and of her own complicity in the problem through her failure to place an emphasis on the value of education. She chose instead to blame the school system in general, and this teacher in particular, for her son's failure. Although her Letter to the Editor did nothing to improve her son's academic standing in the class, it brought negative public attention to the school which can threaten the morale of the educators who work there, a problem which may have been heightened given the community-oriented setting of this high school.

Interestingly, this is not an isolated incident for this school system, as the following Fall semester another very vocal parent wrote an article which was published in the same local paper, once more condemning the school system for her son's academic problems and for failing to meet her demands for accommodations for his learning disability. Despite a full range of services being offered to her son, this parent demanded services far above the accepted standards and publicly derided the school administrators and teachers for failing to meet those demands. Teachers and administrators alike commented to me on those letters and news articles, explaining to me the anger they felt at having to defend their choices and their policies, along with the fact that they felt it was damaging to the school's overall reputation. As one educator commented: "These are those teachers' reputation they were talking about -- the teachers that I would want MY child to have some day. I was furious that was printed in the paper . . . They [the parents] were mad about it and wanted someone to pay for it."

Incidents such as those described above served as a source of frustration for the teachers, as the parents' over-involvement undermined the authority of the teacher. Based upon conversations with the teachers, it appeared they were generally more sympathetic with students who had under-involved parents, as this elicited concern from the teacher for the welfare of the student, while students with over-involved parents were not given the same level of sympathy because they carried themselves with a sense of entitlement. Lareau (2000) provides similar observations, noting that successful upper-middle class parents often felt educationally and occupationally superior to the teachers and were therefore willing to question the decisions made by the teachers and were more willing than working-class parents to make complaints to administrators.

In addition to the parents who complain about punishments given to their children or presumed unfavorable classroom policies, the teachers also often reported that some parents simply would not believe the teacher when a call was made to the home to report that their child was misbehaving. Mrs. Prince, a Guidance Counselor at the school, reported that she found this to be a recurring problem. She and Mrs. Osborne separately recalled that at one time in recent semesters, a teacher had posted a cartoon strip on her door that reflected this very problem. The cartoon depicted two scenes, one labeled as the 1960s and the other as present-day. In the 1960s, a child is holding a report card with Fs on it and the parent is pointing his finger at the child. In the present-day strip, the scene shows the parent wagging his finger at the teacher. Clearly, when this trend has reached the point that it is being reflected in nationally syndicated cartoon strips, it is a systemic problem which reflects a change at the societal level. Mrs. Masters succinctly summed up with situation when she stated: “Back when I was in school, if a teacher called home, my parents would have wanted to know what **I** did, not what the teacher did to me.”

Just as classroom teachers reported this communication problem with parents, so too did Mr. Hunter, one of the administrators routinely in charge of discipline administration. He provided the following example as indicative of a common problem that he and other administrators face at the school:

I'll call the parent and talk to the parent, and then I'll let the kid talk to the parent, and you wouldn't believe this, but certain parents will believe their kid over the adult. I've never understood that. My Mom would have never believed me over an adult authority figure. And they'll lie – the kids. They will tell lies to try to stay out of trouble, and the parents will believe that. Some will try to turn it around and put it back on the teacher. Let's say for instance Ms. Huffington sends a kid to me for cussing her out. The parent will ask 'Well, what did Ms. Huffington do to him to get cussed out?' Rather than focusing on the problem

that their child has cussed at a teacher, the parent will want to know what the teacher did to provoke that. It's unbelievable.

Some teachers reported mixed reactions from parents when they were notified of their child's misdeeds. Mr. Jones explained that it had been his experience that some parents are quite agreeable on the phone, and they will promise the teacher to talk to the student, but then it is never quite apparent whether they did or did not. Mrs. Osborne made a similar observation, that parents will say one thing to the teacher on the phone, but then their actions do not appear to match their words. "They want the school to think they care, but I'm not so sure that they really do." In some instances, the student's behavior will improve in the short-term, only to soon revert to the same poor patterns. Other times, no discernible change can be noticed. Mrs. Masters provides a similar but expanded response on this issue:

I'm a parent caller. Usually, the parents will listen. Kids know you're serious about it after you've taken the time to call their parents and they will change. But the worst kids, the ones who won't change, are the ones who have parents that just don't care. Sometimes, you'll get an okay response from the parents on the phone, but then the problem continues with the child. Then the parents will start making excuses for the child. More often than not, I think it is the parents who make the excuses, not the child.

Many teachers also discussed problems securing contact with the parents at all. Reports were made about parents who would not answer emails, parents who would not return calls, parents who would not come to requested conferences. In every instance, the teachers explained that they knew this situation was something that was beyond the control of the student, but ultimately that most of these students were the ones who were suffering the most, both academically and behaviorally. The teachers recognized that it sent a strong message to the student that school was not important or that the parent did not care about their misbehavior. As Mr. Williams notes, "Education has to be a priority

at home, not just at school.” Unfortunately, for many of the troubled students, this simply is not the case, a fact which was recognized by all of the teachers who participated in this study. As Ms. Greene concludes: “Some of these kids have got so much going on at home, they can’t possibly succeed at school.”

UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENT

Teacher perception of the student’s home life also has the potential to impact how the teachers interact with the students. Although evidence in the literature suggests that teachers who know students come from impoverished or less-educated families have lowered expectations of those students, this research project did not confirm that supposition. In particular, Ms. Greene dispelled this myth on a regular basis both through her noted interactions with students and her comments to me. For example, she regularly calls the students in her classes “Son” or “Daughter” when she speaks to them. She explains to me that she believes this conveys to them that she truly cares about their success. “Many of these kids come from very unfortunate backgrounds. I’m hoping this message that I care carries over to them when they go back home in the evening, too.” Similarly, Mrs. Carmichael, a Science teacher, points out students in her class whom she knows come from troubled backgrounds, and she demonstrates through her words and actions that she wants to see these students succeed. For example, discussing one of her female students, she confides to me that the student had come to the school from a correctional institute, but that she is “trying really hard to stay out of trouble.” When she noticed on one occasion that this girl was seemingly becoming quite friendly with another girl who was known to have a drug problem, Mrs. Carmichael, along with another teacher, spoke to the girl privately in the hallway, cautioning her to be wise in her

choice of friends. As for the girl with the known drug problem, even she was given some level of consideration as to *why* she was involved with drugs. Mrs. Carmichael explained to me that the girl had recently been suspended for snorting the contents of a capsule “right on her desk,” and that “She deals, too, but I think she comes from a poor family, so it’s a way to make some money.” This statement is made with no judgment in her voice: it is simply a fact of life. At no time during the course of the semester was this student observed being treated any differently by the teacher than other students in this class.

Mrs. Masters, an English teacher, engages students in writing exercises that relates scenes from the novels they are studying to events in their personal lives. She explains to me that the primary reason for this type of assignment is that it allows the students to connect with the authors and see how the story fits with their own experiences. At the same time, it provides her with insight into what the students may be facing outside of class that has the potential to impact their class performance. The students are also required to share their narratives aloud in class, and in some instances the work is displayed on the walls for others to read. The following reflection paper demonstrates the daily struggles that some children face. It is also indicative of the struggle faced by single mothers; in this case, the mother took the appropriate steps to shield her young daughter from a dangerous situation once it became known to her. Today, Mrs. Masters explains to me, this student is performing well in school and is popular among her peers.

FUNNEL CAKES

I was allowed to eat funnel cakes at the fair. I could even lick my finger and stick it in the white powder, then lick it again. At home, I was allowed to get a soda out of the fridge all by myself.

But at Uncle David's it was different. On days my Mom worked late, he would pick me up from Day Care in his big loud black Camaro. We would go to his house.

Lots of people stayed there. People with nappy hair and sometimes a tooth missing. I found a tooth under the coffee table once.

That forbidden coffee table was intriguing. Funnel cake powder was scattered over the glass. The nappy haired people got drinks from the fridge and left them on the coffee table. I wasn't allowed to drink the drinks or lick the powdered sugar. I just sat on the steps and watched them till Mom came.

A few weeks later Mom told me David wasn't my uncle anymore. I don't eat funnel cakes anymore either.

Similar stories emerged during this week of writing, with one student revealing her shock at discovering her dad's homosexuality, leaving her to feel that she had been deceived for years. She discussed the grief over having lost him from her life, even though it was she who had chosen to no longer see him. Another recalled her parent's divorce at ten, and how she had worked through that loss in her life, while yet another discussed the death of her infant brother from SIDS, ultimately leading to her dad's alcoholism, depression and separation from the family. Others discussed isolated incidents, such as one girl who was molested by a stranger at the public library and how scared she felt when she reported it to the police. Mrs. Masters explains to me that through these vignettes, the students can connect with the material under study, but it also provides her a window into their world so that she can work with their individual needs on a case-by-case basis. Although it does not appear that these life stories have led to any of these particular students becoming troubled at school, it is clear that the teachers are

trying to become aware of life circumstances that have the potential to cause problems at school.

Mrs. Osborne, too, is noted for her understanding of the problems associated with student home-life, and as previously noted, shares her personal cell number with students so they may call on her if they are distraught about something at home. Similar to Mrs. Masters, she also employs writing assignments for her students to connect with the material. Mrs. Osborne shared the following poem, written by a student whom she explained to me had come to the school the previous year from another area of the state. Although he was only seventeen, he had been homeless, taken into the custody of the state, and placed with distant relatives who live in the community. The school had not yet been able to secure past educational records for this student, and he was currently being provided Special Education services due to his emotional disturbances caused by his turbulent home life. Under other life circumstances, she explains to me, this student could have possibly qualified for Gifted and Talented Educational Services, but now, with his eighteenth birthday looming and his education almost completed, along with the missing test scores from years past, he would most likely finish school without any formal recognition of his talent for writing. She tells me that she is encouraging him to apply for scholarships, but that he has not made any serious effort to follow through with that, and she is not sure whether he is getting any encouragement from the distant relatives who have taken him in at the behest of the state.

I AM
I am from the town of peace
Born into Luxury
Then
Poverty Followed
Razed only by the name of my father
Memories
Vanishing in flames
Lives continue
That never should have begun to start with
Anger growing
Ideas falling
Every day is almost meaningless
I must give up everything
To make something out of myself
I
Am from the End
Of my former life.

Although this student has emotional disturbances, he is not a troublemaker at school. He works hard and is a likeable young man, although his life experiences, quiet personality and (possibly) his affiliation with Special Education, has kept him from becoming an outgoing or well-known student at the school.

In contrast, Raymond, another student in this class with a similarly troubled background, is quite outgoing and talkative. I have observed him in multiple classes during this study, reaching the conclusion that his classmates perceive him as strange and generally “an outsider.” His poetry, short and direct, from the same unit assignment, lies in stark contrast to the poignant reflection of the first young man.

WHAT I LIKE

I like to watch horror movies

I like to watch people get tortured

In movies

I like to watch them scream

I like to watch people try to evade

The ones who are hurting them

She explains to me that this assignment has crossed an unspoken boundary, and she has turned a copy of it over to the guidance office for appropriate follow-up. While she does not believe it indicates in any way a tangible threat to others, it is certainly indicative of a student who is in need of psychological management. Her willingness, along with that of other teachers, to reach out to students who come from troubled family circumstances, is evidence that a teachers’ job does not end with the school day. Both teachers, Mrs. Masters and Mrs. Osborne, show a genuine concern for the welfare of their students, both in and out of the classroom. Unfortunately, in some instances, parents are unwilling to accept the advice or the authority of the adults who spend a significant

amount of time with their children each day and who have come to know their children so well.

Ultimately, almost every teacher who participated in this study made mention of issues that students have to deal with outside the school. The academic literature suggests that undesirable home life conditions place a child at a higher risk of academic failure relative to peers who come to school equipped with social and cultural capital (Lareau, 2000; Dumais, 2002; Lareau, 2003). The observations conducted as part of this study tend to support the notion that the students who are lacking the advantages of a supportive home (as indicated by symbolic displays of social class affiliation and teacher comments) are the ones who are struggling academically and behaviorally. Nonetheless, this research project also demonstrated that teachers and administrators alike at this particular school are aware of the academic and social problems associated with poverty or troubled home lives and they are striving on a daily basis to enhance the academic performance of all students regardless of social background through individualized attention by many teachers and particularly through the PRAISE program. At the same time, however, the recognition that some students come from more affluent or well-connected families appears to allow those students the freedom to deviate from the norms of acceptable behavior to a slightly higher degree than students without these connections.

COMPOUNDED PROBLEMS – DEFIANCE, DISRESPECT, LACK OF MOTIVATION

Defiance of authority and disrespectful tones were common occurrences at the school; moreover, it is a problem commonly noted in the literature. What is not often documented, however, is the impact the defiance and disrespect has on teachers' stress

levels and morale within the school, nor how it impacts their decision-making process in determining when to send a child to an administrator for follow-up on his or her poor behavior. Through the observations within the classrooms and the follow-up interviews the daily issues of defiance and disrespect takes on a new meaning.

Some teachers at the school utilize a form called Refusal to Work form, which they ask students to sign if the student is voluntarily choosing not to complete an assignment or to participate in class. Surprisingly, a full range of reasons are listed on the form for the student to initial if it applies to their decision. For example, a student can check “I was not interested in the assignment,” “I didn’t want to do the work,” “I chose to talk instead of listening to the teacher,” “I didn’t have the proper materials to do the work,” “I was too tired/bored/unable to concentrate to do the work,” or “I fell asleep.” Although it is a form that is typically utilized by teachers who work with Special Education students, it is a form that many teachers are familiar with and which they have adapted for general education students, too. (It is commonly used for Special Education students as a way to document efforts made to accommodate their specific needs and which, if signed by the student, is indicative that the school made the attempt to engage the student. For all intents and purposes, it is a legal remedy intended to protect the teachers and administrators from irate parents such as those mentioned above.) Nonetheless, as Mrs. Osborne explains, “Some parents won’t believe you, even if you have the form signed.”

Defiance of the teacher’s authority, whether it is through active defiance and belligerence or through passive refusals to work, was an issue that was mentioned unanimously by the teachers participating in the study. Mrs. Caudill, who has been

teaching for six years, admits that “I was not prepared for that as a teacher. Students will argue with you about even asking them to go to their seats. They act like it’s an unreasonable request to tell them to go sit down.” She goes on to explain that this attitude impacts her decision-making process about discipline:

Referrals are not effective. I know students who’ve said “I’ve got Saturday detention until the end of the year, so I don’t care if you give me a referral. I’m not going to be in any more trouble than I already am.” Others just refuse to go anyway. One student actually told me: “I’m not going to go. You can write me up. It doesn’t matter.”

Because of this attitude, she explains that she seldom gives referrals to the administrators, and that when she does, it is only for the most extreme circumstances. Instead, she has chosen the method of negotiation, in an effort to curb the poor behavior. She also has students stay after school with her on occasions to complete work they have not done in class, rather than sending them to an administrator. (Teachers may assign detention directly, without sending the student to an administrator). As previously noted, Mrs. Caudill provides positive reinforcement and encouragement to her students on a regular basis, an approach which appears to moderate student behavior. Although she was observed to have some students who were overly talkative, she discounts that type of behavior as “that’s just teenagers.”

Ms. Greene, the English teacher who routinely shows her students a great deal of empathy for their individual situations, even hesitates to use the word “defiance” when discussing the attitude of many students who were observed misbehaving or disrespecting her in the classroom. Instead, she does not see it as “misbehavior” at all, but rather a “disrespectful countenance.” Similar to Mrs. Caudill, she discussed her surprise when first encountering the shift in attitude among students today, compared to earlier

generations. “I didn’t understand what they thought their basis was for that attitude of disrespect. When I started here, it just blew me away. They didn’t understand how tender MY feelings are.” Nonetheless, in line with her understanding personality, she explains that even in cases where she has had disagreements with students, they have returned to her later and apologized for their attitude. She tries to use the negative occurrences as a learning opportunity. She provides two examples of recent instances of “disrespectful countenance” to illustrate her philosophy: In one, a boy was “cursing me, lashing out at me . . . and I wanted a definite discipline to show him a consequence, and so I called PRAISE to come and talk to him. It was like shock therapy, and then later that day, he came up and apologized to me and asked me for a hug.” The other incident involved another boy, who was angry at another student in the class, so he walked out of class without asking permission or saying anything to Ms. Greene. When she asked where he was going, he just ignored her and kept on walking. “I said to him later, you didn’t *honor* me, didn’t respect me enough to answer me.” She says that she tries to explain to students that back in “her day” students were taught to respect parents and teachers, and she tells them that “When you learn to respect others, then you can expect to *get* respect yourself.”

Mr. Jones also comments on the problems of defiance, specifically mentioning an episode which has been described in detail in another portion of this analysis of the student who bragged about getting a referral for calling Mr. Jones an unfavorable word. He says that defiance is the most common reason he gives out referrals to the administrators, and he mentions a girl who repeatedly used the word “Fuck” in class and included that word in a term directed at him. Mr. Jones appears to give referrals to the

students who *actively* defy his authority, rather than to those who sit passively in the class yet who do not cause serious disruption. For those students, he employs a different tactic in an effort to persuade them to do work. For example, on one occasion, he asked a student “Aren’t you going to do any work today?” to which the student replied “I don’t know. I might later.” Mr. Jones did not interpret this as an active form of defiance, but rather as the student simply not caring about the assignment. In a similar incident, he asked a student “What do your parents think about you failing this class?” When the boy responded that “Mom knows, yeah, but it doesn’t make a difference,” Mr. Jones encouraged him to put forth some effort, telling him “It’s not too late, you know.” Even with his encouragement, however, the boy’s response was “Well, it’s not going to happen, at least not this semester.” As the first semester of this project came to a close, Mr. Jones was reviewing literature on classroom management methods employed by other educators, actively seeking a way to discourage misbehavior in his classroom as well as seeking ways to encourage student engagement. During the second semester of this project, he had concluded that things were a bit better, but that in some classes he still encountered significant behavior problems. Although in several observed instances in his classroom the level of defiance and misbehavior was significant, Mr. Jones followed up on most of those occasions by taking the students aside to speak to them privately about their behavior or to write them a referral after class.

In many classes, particularly classes taught by Ms. Greene, Mrs. Thomas, Mr. Williams and Mr. Jones, the associated problems of defiance, disrespect and refusal to work often appeared to be a result of students who happened to be clustered together in a particular class. It was not any individual student, but rather the *combination* of student

personalities joining together collaboratively (or sometimes clashing) that caused the problems. Mr. Williams points out that some classes are so large that management is made incredibly difficult regardless of the class roster, but most of the students at this school have grown up together and are friends. They register for similar courses, and ultimately they end up in many of the same classes. “They feed off each other.” Rather than seeing the defiant attitudes and misbehavior as a result of dysfunctional homes or improper parenting, however, he focuses the issue as a potential consequence of academic ability:

They don’t want to admit that they don’t understand the work, and that frustrates them, and so the teacher becomes the target of their frustrations. Some of them will say “I just didn’t want to do it,” but I really think it’s because they still can’t do it, and so they say they didn’t want to do it instead.

Although other teachers noted behavioral differences between students in general education and Honors courses, Mr. Williams emphasized the issue of academic ability to a greater degree than other teachers as an explanation for the negative attitudes or misbehavior. By seeing this issue as an academic issue rather than a behavioral issue, Mr. Williams’ disciplinary methods within the classroom are often softer-toned than other teachers at the school. Like others, he wants to see the students succeed and master the material as is evidenced by his plaintive statement “I just want them to show me that they can do the work.” Therefore, when students act out, as many do on a daily basis in his classes, he threatens to refer them to an administrator, but follows through only when his patience is at the very limit.

Thus, while some teachers chose not to utilize referrals for reasons as diverse as the belief that referrals anger students causing them to act out even more to the belief that

referrals did not intimidate students (particularly those who were the regular offenders), others see the referral process as a necessary tool to show students where they draw the line of acceptable conduct. Each teacher provided reasons to justify their choices, and those reasons appeared to correspond to the diverse ways in which they chose to manage their classes.

PROBLEMS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Teachers also commented on behavior problems in the corridors of the school as well as problems within the classrooms. The corridors are chaotic: The time between classes is a “down time” for the students, but it is a very limited amount of time (five minutes) between classes which results in rushing from hallway to hallway to avoid being tardy. Some students attempt to change books at their lockers between classes although most carry oversized book bags to every class to avoid the need for a locker break. There is a great deal of jostling in the corridors, as everyone moves with a sense of urgency. At the same time, however, students are also trying to connect with friends, to engage in a minute or two of small talk, and this adds to the chaos as the voices sometimes become quite loud as students yell over their shoulders as they pass a friend or stop in the middle of the hall for a brief conversation. As clusters of students join together for camaraderie, the volume level increases with the addition of each new friend within the circle. It is not uncommon to hear foul language in the hallways, usually being used jokingly in conversations but sometimes between students who are arguing. Time between classes is also a time for young couples to walk hand in hand or to engage in a quick kiss as they part company. Although public displays of affection are a violation of the Code of Conduct, teachers at the school routinely ignore hand-holding or hugging. Kissing,

however, is generally not tolerated, and couples were observed being told to “break it up” on several occasions during this study.

The sense of powerlessness to control misbehavior in the hallways has the potential to lessen morale among the faculty at the school which could ultimately impact the amount of effort the teacher gives inside the classroom both with respect to controlling behavior and to the academic emphasis in the classroom. Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Black both specifically mentioned hallway misbehavior, tying it with the general trend of defiance and disrespect. Mrs. Thomas references students who are continually “mouthing off”:

There’s just no respect for authority. And the problem is worse out in the halls. In the halls, I don’t know all their names. There’s just too many of them, breaking the dress code, talking rudely, using foul language. And if you try to correct them, they just ignore you. They know that you don’t know their names. You can’t write them up. And so you tell them to stop what they’re doing, but it’s not likely that it’s going to change their behavior.

Mrs. Black also comments on the problem that she encounters when attempting to manage student behavior in the corridors:

If I see a kid in the hallway that I don’t know, I’ll ask them to do something, and they’ll get really rude and sassy and disrespectful. They think they are in charge of the hallways, and since I don’t know who they are, they think they can get away with it.

WORKING WITH THE PRAISE PROGRAM

Inside the classroom at BCHS, where teachers know the students by name, they often utilize the intervention services of the PRAISE coordinator and paraeducators as a second line of defense when dealing with disrespect or defiant students when their own informal sanctions have been unsuccessful. Mr. Williams routinely utilizes the PRAISE program to help redirect student behavior, an effort which is in line with his teaching

philosophy of striving for academic mastery rather than employing strict disciplinary methods. He points out that for at least one of his classes, the PRAISE educators are with him on a daily basis, a fact that allows him time to focus on teaching rather than handling misbehavior. Similar sentiments regarding the effectiveness of PRAISE to control misbehaving students and encourage them to reflect on the consequences of their actions were echoed by other teachers participating in this study including Mrs. Carmichael (“I *love* the PRAISE system”) and Mrs. Thomas (“It’s the most wonderful thing ever invented”). Others pointed out that they rarely had to call on PRAISE. However, as one teacher commented, “Just because you don’t call them doesn’t mean you don’t need them.” This subjective statement may be true in some instances, but the objective classroom management methods employed by many teachers participating in this study appear quite effective without assistance from PRAISE.

UTILIZING THE REFERRAL PROCESS AND IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION

For teachers who choose not to utilize the PRAISE services, the next line of defense is often a call or email to the parents of students who routinely misbehave. As noted above, this method is sometimes effective and other times the messages appear to go unheard. Moreover, as several teachers noted, even when it is effective, it is often short-lived. The next line of defense is then to give a referral to the student to see one of the administrators at the school who will then decide upon an appropriate punishment. In the instances when a referral is given, the outcome is beyond the control of the teacher. The administrators may choose to discuss the issue firmly with the student without any formal punishment, to call the parent, to assign the student to daily detention (which the teacher can also do) or to Saturday Detention, or to suspend the student either via the In-

School Suspension process or Out-of-School Suspension. The In-School Suspension process was found to be a highly criticized program at BCHS, with every teacher who participated in this study making at least one (but more often several) critical statements about the process during the course of this research project. Thus, since it is a source of continual frustration for the teachers at the school which adds to their sense of powerlessness, it is an area which needs to be considered as it clearly impacts the decisions of the teachers when deciding what type of punishment they think a student should receive for misbehavior.

The In-School Suspension program is known as the Alternative Behavior Choices program, called by its acronym "ABC." The administrator in charge of the program is Mr. Griffin, a tall, muscular and somewhat physically intimidating middle-aged male who has worked in various forms of discipline administration at the school for fourteen years. During the Spring semester, the room is organized with study cubicles forming a squared-U shape around three sides of the room. It can hold up to twenty-six students at a time, and there are days when it is filled to capacity with a few extra students being seated at desks placed in the middle of the room. On the occasions when it becomes heavily crowded, students are rescheduled to serve their punishment at another time. Mr. Griffin has a booming voice which easily carries across the room and down the hallway. He engages in conversation easily, and other faculty members, administrators and athletic coaches come in to the ABC room to chat with him throughout the day. When he is not engaged in conversation with other adults, he watches over the ABC students with a keen eye for the almost constant acts of misbehavior that students engage in to break up the boredom of the area.

Mr. Griffin estimates that about sixty percent of the students who are in ABC on any given day are there for skipping class or for receiving multiple tardies, and the remainder are there for disrespect and defiance, such as throwing paper wads across the room or defying the teacher in some other way. He sees his role as critical in maintaining order, or at least the sense of order, at the school:

Being a Vice Principal or the ISS teacher, or even any classroom teacher, is a lot like being a police officer. You know you're not going to catch everyone, or ever end the problems, but you can't stop trying because then you'd have anarchy.

Given his long history in discipline administration at the school, he is aware of the warning signs that a student is headed for trouble:

You know the kids are headed down the wrong path when their attendance starts to slip. That's the first warning sign. Then they get behind, and they probably weren't doing all that good to start with, but when they start skipping, they just get farther behind.

Teachers routinely comment on the lack of effectiveness of ABC to effect a change in the students' behavior. They routinely noted that while it served to remove belligerent and disruptive students from their classrooms, it did not necessarily do anything to deter the student from future acts of misbehavior. They also believed that in some instances students preferred to have a day in the ABC room to catch up on work they had missed in various classes or, in many instances, as an opportunity to catch up on sleep. The following observed incidents are typical of the criticisms voiced by the teachers:

On one particular visit to the ABC room, I am there when the students are lining up for a restroom break and then to go to the cafeteria to get their lunch trays, which they bring back to the room. Jamal, an African American student whom I've observed in the

regular classrooms and who is often times disrupting class, is in the room today. Mr. Griffin announces that it is time to go, but Jamal has his head down on the desk of his cubicle, awake but doing nothing. He ignores Mr. Griffin's command to line up so Mr. Griffin repeats "Okay, let's line up," but again Jamal does not move. The third time, Mr. Griffin calls him by name, "Jamal, come on, let's go," but Jamal still does not comply. Mr. Griffin states facetiously to the class as a whole, "Well, I don't know, Jamal's gone deaf *and* mute sometime since he got here today. Let's go." And, with that, Jamal, who still has his head down on his desk, is left behind. Mr. Griffin returns later with Jamal's lunch so that he will not go hungry.

Students utilizing ABC as an opportunity to catch up on sleep is a regular occurrence, made even more noticeable on one day that I visit when a white boy, Jeremy, has brought a pillow to ABC. In the time span of an hour, Mr. Griffin awakens him three times, each time telling him to wake up and get some work out of his bookbag. Jeremy rises up each time, spends a couple of minutes appearing busy, then returns to his pillow to sleep. After the third admonition, Mr. Griffin calls Jeremy to his desk, telling him to bring the pillow to him. Jeremy is disheveled, looking as if he is either under the influence of drugs or perhaps that he has not slept in a couple of days. His eyes are glassy and he speaks in a slow voice. When Mr. Griffin takes the pillow, Jeremy protests, saying "But I'm not disturbing anybody." Mr. Griffin tells him to go find some work to do.

Mr. Griffin explains to me that this is Jeremy's fifth day in a row in ABC. When I inquire what offense might have earned him five days in a row, Mr. Griffin explains that it may not have been a single offense, but rather several offenses that led to several days

of punishment. He also explains to me, as he has on other occasions, that he is not always aware of the circumstances as to why students are sent to ABC, nor does not believe the actual reason for their presence on any given day is important. He also points out that he does not keep any type of running tally of a student's past misdeeds. "I don't hold their past against them. It's a clean slate every time they come in here."

On yet another occasion, Mr. Griffin finds a boy using dipping tobacco in the classroom. He calls this student, Benjamin, to his desk, asking "Ben, do you have dip in?" Ben denies this, and Mr. Griffin states "Right there. Pull your lip down." Ben complies with Mr. Griffin's request, and indeed, he is using tobacco, a clear violation of the school's no-tobacco policy. Mr. Griffin tells him, "Ben, you can maybe get that over on another teacher, but not me. Go spit it out. And then I want you to think, between now and this afternoon, what you think your punishment should be. Not right now, but you tell me later." The willingness of Mr. Griffin to work individually with this student on an issue that would typically lead the student directly to an administrator demonstrates that he is willing to work with students on a case-by-case basis when determining sanctions for misbehavior and even to involve the student in the decision-making process. When combined with his attitude of not relying on a student's past to judge their present behavior, Mr. Griffin demonstrates to the students at BCHS that he is a fair and open-minded disciplinarian. At the same time, however, students routinely ignore his admonitions for order in his room. On the occasions that I visited the ABC room, Mr. Griffin spent a significant amount of his day calling students to order, telling them to stop talking, put their phone away, quit listening to music, get their feet off the desk, etc. It is repetitious behavior management, and it is a tedious and thankless task, as Mr. Griffin is

highly criticized by many of his peers for what they perceive as his willingness to let the students sleep and “get away with” doing nothing productive.

Many teachers are critical of the way that ABC is run, yet they recognize that it serves a positive function in the school. As Mrs. Thomas notes, it frees up her time, first by reducing her class size and removing the worst behavior offenders from the class which impedes the learning process for the students who are engaged in the material. Nonetheless, she is critical of the program:

It’s a joke. Kids are in there with their cell phones, they’re texting back and forth, they’re listening to their Ipods. I never get any work back from there. I’ll send a quiz or a test, and I never get it back . . . And if the kids are down there defying him [Mr. Griffin], what do you do? That is already their punishment.”

Mrs. Carmichael voices a similar complaint:

ABC does not work. I never get work back that I’ve sent down to them. They do nothing in there, they just sit there. It needs to be something that kids don’t want to go to. They should be expected to work in there, and they’re not. It’s not effective right now.

Mrs. Osborne, too, uses the word “joke” when describing the current In-School Suspension program. She goes on to explain that on one occasion, she had a student tell her that on the days he was assigned to ABC, he would take a sleeping pill before coming to school so that he could sleep through the day. Similar to Mrs. Carmichael, she believes that it should be a room dedicated to enforcement of the rules, with an emphasis placed on completing academic material while the student is there. This would stop the process of kids acting as if ABC were a reward of some type rather than a punishment. She would like to see it ran as if it were a type of academic intervention program, with instructors dedicated to academic efforts to help the students succeed.

Although there is general agreement that ABC is a better alternative than suspending the child from school, with the current shortcomings it only becomes a simple way to keep problem students from distracting other students in the class, but without any real benefit to the students who are in ABC. The school needs some type of plan that would be a deterrent to future acts of misbehavior; moreover, the school needs to be able to enforce that students complete assignments while they are in ABC and obey the teacher in charge, Mr. Griffin. The lack of completion of work while in ABC is a chief complaint among teachers, most of whom noted that they routinely sent work to Mr. Griffin for the students to complete, only to never receive any work back from the student. Mr. Griffin likewise notes that he regularly updates teachers as to which of their students are in the ABC room, sending out emails requesting work be sent down. He, however, notes that he often does not get any work. Thus, there has been a breakdown in the communication process between the classroom teachers and Mr. Griffin which complicates the issue. Mr. Griffin asks for work (which he independently verifies to me on multiple occasions showing me the emailed requests for work) yet some teachers have become discouraged by the failure of students to complete work in ABC that some have now discontinued sending the work at all. The finger of blame is pointed in both directions – some teachers blame Mr. Griffin for not making the students do the work in the first place, while Mr. Griffin blames some of the teachers for no longer sending work to his room. The student, in the meantime, often gets a “free pass” on schoolwork for the day, as he or she may have no significant material to complete. Students with nothing to do will often *find* things to do, and this appears to be the case on the several occasions I observed the ABC room. Students whisper and giggle, push each other’s chairs, punch

each other's shoulders, surreptitiously attempt to use their iPods or cell phones. Others simply do nothing: they sleep. During the second semester of this study, Mr. Griffin had taken steps to change the level of apathy in the ABC room. The cubicles had been removed and the desks had been replaced with individual chairs. Students were expected to sit in their small chairs, which was anticipated to be a deterrent from *wanting* to go to ABC or not caring if they were assigned to ABC. However, this did nothing to enhance the academic process, as it would be incredibly difficult to complete schoolwork, especially written assignments, in a seat with no desk area. Moreover, the observed occasions in the reconfigured ABC room did not appear to have impacted the behavior of students who were there.

It is not only the ABC room which is perceived as ineffective. School policy in general is structured in such a way that students who do not care about school, or who do not want to be there in the first place, find themselves in a position to be able to achieve their non-productive goals. Mrs. Masters provides an excellent summation of the problems teachers face at the classroom level, speaking of systemic issues – both within the familial institution and the educational institution -- which she feels are detrimental to the educational process and which ultimately impact how teachers react to misbehavior:

I'm not a yeller, but if I raise my voice, then most will realize I'm serious. I'm usually pretty laid back. But some classes just don't seem to care. It's about their upbringing. If a student is willing to tell a teacher to fuck off, then you know they're doing it at home. And the fact is, there's not much you can do about it. Just assign the work and accept the attitude. Writing them up doesn't do anything, ABC doesn't deter them. And then Saturday school, well, they don't show up for that either. After three detentions, the policy is OSS, and they don't care. They didn't want to be here in the first place. It is truly a flawed system. The school is really powerless to do anything with those kids.

The various themes that emerged during this project – the varying methods teachers employed, the significance of “attitude” (including lack of motivation on the part of the students and the corresponding attitude of parents), the relationship that teachers see between the home and the school, and their dismay with the dysfunctions of the in-school suspension program – combine to impact the teachers’ morale and their willingness to sanction students for misbehavior.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ADMINISTRATIVE VIEWPOINT

The manner in which disobedient students are managed at the administrative level will be the focus of the seventh chapter. Administrators at the school regularly monitor the corridors and the cafeteria, as well as being directly responsible for the administration of punishment of wayward students. This school also employs a separate administrative position in the adjacent Alternative Education Program, which operates as a cooperative exchange school between regular classes and intervention services. Students who are failing in one or more subject areas, as well as those who exhibit serious conduct problems, are referred to the Alternative Education Program (AEP) for remedial academic services or to continue their educational studies while efforts are made at behavior management. In some instances, the students get caught up academically and return to the regular high school classes; other times, they continue to lag academically or continue to exhibit serious behavioral problems. In those cases, they complete their secondary education through AEP. (During this study period, AEP was serving approximately 85 students in its core program (where students attend their classes entirely at AEP) and an additional 110 students who were utilizing the services of AEP to recover credits they had not earned in the main high school. Approximately 100 more students were being serviced by AEP as part of a paid labor force endeavor whereby they earn credits toward high school graduation through work in the community along with attending classes at AEP. Discipline problems which arise within the confines of AEP are handled directly by the AEP Coordinator and Principal, a combined administrative position held by Mrs. Simpson. At the administrative level, efforts were continually made in both the main high school and at AEP to find ways to keep the students in the

learning environment rather than advance to the harsher punishment of Out of School Suspension.

Similar to the classroom teachers, the administrators had strong opinions on the causes of misbehavior. Here again, themes emerged similar to those found among the teachers. Specifically, the issue of attitude, both student and parent, surfaced many times, as did the issue of the importance of understanding the home life of the student. A new theme appeared at the administrative level: the importance of determining what is causing failure among a subgroup of students. This concept is important because it directly relates to the potential for misbehavior. This chapter will give consideration to the viewpoints of administrators at the high school and at AEP, relating back to the themes of the connection between home and school and the attitudes of defiance and disrespect by students and, to a lesser degree, the attitude of the parents. The decision-making process will be examined, giving consideration to how those themes impact the disciplinary actions for the students. As in earlier portions, specific incidences will be discussed and used to illustrate areas of concern. Connections with the academic literature will be made in light of the findings of this research project, demonstrating that some findings at this school are consistent with the academic literature while other findings are divergent from the literature. Those findings will be explored near the end of the chapter.

This chapter will also include a brief analysis of types of misbehavior that occurred at the school during the research period based upon the disciplinary data from two full months of the academic school year, considering whether any specific factors (such as race or gender) appeared to play a role in disciplinary outcome. A summary of

data from the PRAISE system will also be considered, as the outcomes of some PRAISE students are directly on point with the academic literature with respect to time out of the classroom and the potential for academic failure.

CASUAL OBSERVATIONS

On several occasions throughout the time I am at the high school, I spend time observing student behavior and their interactions with authority figures in the lunchroom. This provides a change of pace from the classroom observations, where the students are expected to be on their best behavior at all times. The lunchroom is a down-time for the adolescents, a time when they can socialize, laugh and chatter with their friends without worrying about classroom expectations. Nevertheless, the lunchroom is not a place where the students are entirely free; rules still exist, and school policies such as “no hats” and “no public displays of affection” are still in place, although with the expectation that socialization will occur with some measure of containment. The lunchroom is quite noisy, nonetheless, as normal voices, when multiplied by several hundred students at a time, are understandably loud.

Teachers routinely monitor lunchroom behavior, as this is the place where it is expected that feuding students may find an opportunity to argue and fight. The lunchroom monitoring system is set up so that an administrator will always be present, unless he or she has been called away unexpectedly on other school business. In addition to the administrator, a minimum of two teachers will be found standing guard near the lunch line and against the opposite wall, so that all areas of the lunchroom are visible at any given time to at least one adult. The expected misbehavior, however, seldom occurs. Perhaps it occurs infrequently because the students are being monitored,

but it is just as plausible to believe that the misbehavior occurs infrequently because the majority of students do understand and respect the norms and expectations of lunchroom decorum. The most frequent misbehavior witnessed throughout the study within the walls of the lunchroom were school policy violations, particularly wearing hoodies or toboggans, and couples holding hands, hugging and occasionally “stealing a kiss.” The aggressive behavior, which Mr. Hunter explains is just lurking beneath the surface, is witnessed only once throughout the entire study. In that instance, the aggressive behavior took the form of insolence and defiance of authority, as is demonstrated in the following excerpt:

Mr. Hunter and I are standing near the serving line, which is separated by a four foot dividing wall from the seating area. As is his customary practice, Mr. Hunter will chat amiably with me while he continues to monitor the students for policy violations or more serious forms of misbehavior. Some activity at one of the tables near the middle of the room catches his eye, and he walks toward the group of eight students, all of whom are African American. He speaks in hushed tones to a boy sitting at the table, and the young man rises from his seat and follows Mr. Hunter back toward the area where we have been standing. As he follows Mr. Hunter, he engages in posturing, striking a defiant pose with his shoulders somewhat hunched and a limp to his gait. He says, loudly enough to be heard from several tables away, “What’d I do?” Although he is complying with Mr. Hunter’s unheard request, to come with him, the tone of voice is defiant, seemingly challenging Mr. Hunter’s authority. Mr. Hunter calmly replies, but also loudly enough to be heard, “I asked you to get your stuff and come here.” The student has not retrieved his backpack from the table, as was evidently requested, and he repeats, this

time louder, “What’d I do?” Mr. Hunter pauses, turns around, and says in no uncertain terms, “HEY. I asked you to get your stuff and come here.” The student has also paused, no longer moving toward Mr. Hunter, and a third time he challenges Mr. Hunter by repeating for a third time the question, “What’d I do?” Mr. Hunter simply says, “Okay, let’s go.” He stands beside the student as they walk the few steps back to the table, the student picks up his backpack and Mr. Hunter guides him into the hallway. The young man shrugs and shakes his head several times, as if to indicate that he still doesn’t understand what has happened. A couple of minutes later, as I continue to observe other students in the lunchroom, another administrator stops beside me and, nodding toward the table with a now-empty seat, says “Mr. Hunter just lightened our load.”

A short time later, Mr. Hunter returns, absent the student. I query him as to what prompted him to go to the table in the first place. His response provides insight into the nature of monitoring: “That group is always arguing with the table beside it. He was over there yelling at the other group, and I asked him to get his stuff and come talk to me. You saw his response, just ‘what’d I do’. All I wanted to do was talk to him and get him to settle down.” He pauses for a moment, then continues: “He came here last year from South Carolina and he’s just got meanness. He takes everything and runs with it, just escalates it. He just finished calling his probation officer.” Asked what the punishment was going to be for his defiant attitude, Mr. Hunter explains that he took him to ABC, where he would remain for the rest of the school day. He states, “What could have been simple, just come and talk to me, ended up in in-school suspension. I wasn’t going to talk to him in front of 400 kids. And I’m going to look up his probation officer myself

and call him after lunch.” (Mr. Hunter explains to me that students who are being monitored by the Department of Juvenile Justice or a probation officer do not have the same privacy rights as other students. The school can contact the DJJ or PO directly, bypassing the parents; there is no necessity to get parental permission to discuss problems concerning the student, as the student is now subject to the rules of the Court.)

The foregoing scenario is a useful tool to examine some of the issues which are raised in the academic literature with respect to the response of African American boys to authority figures within the school. Ferguson (2000, also cited by Gregory and Weinstein, 2008)) notes that African American boys may display a tough façade in response to perceived racism within the school. The boy in the preceding example appeared to do just that, challenging Mr. Hunter’s authority as a way to save face among his peers at the lunch table. Moreover, the way in which he carried his body as he walked across the cafeteria is directly in line with West’s (1994, also cited by Gregory and Weinstein, 2008) theory of self-presentation and power:

[F]or most young black men, power is acquired by stylizing their bodies over space and time in such a way that their bodies reflect their uniqueness and provoke fear in others. To be “bad” is good not simply because it subverts the language of the dominant white culture but also because it imposes a unique kind of order for young black men on their own distinctive chaos and solicits an attention that makes others pull back with some trepidation. This young black male style is a form of self-identification and resistance in a hostile culture; it also is an instance of machismo ready for violent encounters (West, 1994:128).

This brief encounter provides a good deal of insight into the nature of teacher or administrator perceptions and reactions. First, the process of labeling is at work in at least two instances. The group with which the boy associates have been previously known to cause trouble, therefore the administrator was paying extra attention to the

group, searching for any signs of misbehavior. At the individual level, the student himself is known as and labeled a troublemaker. Although the label appears in this instance to be based in fact – his attitude and tone with authority bearing out the label – it has nonetheless predisposed the school authority figures to be expecting trouble from him, as is evidenced both by Mr. Hunter’s reaction and the perception of Mr. O’Neil, the other administrator on duty, that Mr. Hunter had acted appropriately by removing the student from the lunchroom area. At the functional level, the swiftness with which the situation was handled has the potential to send a clear message to other potentially defiant students: Obey your teachers and principals, or risk removal from the setting and a day in ABC. Unfortunately, as noted throughout this study, ABC serves primarily to remove the student from the particular situation, but it does not appear to be a process which the students actually fear.

DECIDING ON DISCIPLINE

While the preceding scenario indicates that labeling does occur within the educational system, at no time during the study period did this appear to play a significant role in the administrative disciplinary process. Mr. Hunter uses himself as an example when explaining his reasoning process. He explains first that he has very little tolerance for students who continually misbehave, and then follows that line of thought by stating that he sticks as close as possible to the school’s disciplinary code when punishing students. Just as the teachers discuss the problems of defiance and disrespect, so too does Mr. Hunter, tying it in with his reasons for lack of patience, but not using it as a basis for his disciplinary decisions.

My patience is very thin. I don't have much patience in working with the kids at all. And I don't mean that in a bad way. I don't mind a kid getting into trouble. All kids are going to get in trouble at some time or another. What I mind, and what I have no tolerance for, is the reaction that I get from some of them when they get into trouble. The rudeness, the attitude, the tone of voice, sometimes even cursing at me, that's what I mind. I've got no patience for that kind of thing. And it's the same ones that you always get that from. Most of the kids, the majority of them, are very respectful when you catch them doing something that they shouldn't have. 'Yes, Mr. Hunter, yes, sir, I shouldn't have done that.' About 90, maybe even 95% of them are very respectful. But then you've got that other 5%, 10%, who want to be Billy Bad Ass. They'll even get on the phone with their Mom, and it's the same way. Same tone, same attitude.

Nonetheless, regardless of his frustrations with certain students, he points out that he follows the school's discipline code as closely as possible, even if it angers students or parents: "If I'm a Son-of-A-Gun all day long, I'm at least a consistent Son-of-A-Gun."

On another occasion, when discussing a fight that had broken out while I was observing at the school, he stated: "The rules say five days for fighting, and if you're fighting and get sent to me, that's what you're going to get."

When discussing whether he feels there are behavioral differences between various groups of students, he again references his efforts at consistency, responding: "Myself, I don't care if you're white, black, pink or purple, Honors student or Special Ed, if you do something really bad, I'm going to suspend you." The disciplinary data that will be reviewed in the following section indicates that Mr. Hunter's actions closely approximate his words, as there does not appear to be any indication that he (or Mr. O'Neil) suspends any group at a higher rate than another. The only exception that he mentions, when deciding upon discipline outcomes, relates to students who are identified as Special Education, although it appears from his words that he disagrees with the policy of the Central Office. He states that "We try not to suspend Special Ed kids." When I

ask him to explain the reasoning behind that, especially if they are breaking the rules, he elaborates:

Central Office will fuss at us. As far as the fighting thing, I suspend everybody who gets in a fight. But Central will complain to us that we're messing with the rates if we suspend too many of them. With Special Ed kids, I don't know if you know this, but the rules are different. We are supposed to be below a certain percentage of how many of them are getting suspended. And it doesn't matter, Central will tell us, if we suspend them for one day or for two, each time counts as an incident, the number of days don't matter, so if we have 10 Special Ed kids and one gets suspended, even for a day, then that's 10% that we've suspended.

He goes on to say that he feels that it is only a matter of time before someone starts to complain about minority suspension rates, too, even though he points out that he thinks the school is doing a good job of not discriminating against any racial groups. However, because of the lower number of minority members at the school, he fears that if the data is closely scrutinized, it may appear that minorities are suspended at rates that are too high. He mentions that larger counties in Kentucky, specifically Fayette County, are already engaged in studies that are looking at minority suspension rates. With respect to minority members and the potential to be labeled as troublemakers, an issue that surfaces often in the academic literature, I inquire if he feels that minority members might more often *be* the troublemakers. He responds quickly and without hesitation that he does not agree with that idea.

No, I think it's back to the 5% to 10% thing. About 5 to 10% of them are the bad apples, just like 5 to 10% of the white kids are the bad apples . . . No matter what group you're looking at, you've always got the same 5 to 10% who are just always causing problems.

Mr. O'Neil, another administrator of the school who is also responsible for disciplinary decision, makes similar observations about the school with respect to behavior management policies, disciplinary actions and students who repeatedly get into

trouble. He estimates that of the students who are referred to him for classroom misbehavior, he sees approximately thirty students repeatedly throughout the year. The remainder, the overwhelming majority, are students who only get into mischief once or twice and then they learn to control their behavior. Of the thirty students that he sees regularly in his office, he believes that most of them have some environmental issue at home, either economic struggles or a single parent who is not always available for the child. For many of them, this has been a pattern that has been in place for many years, so he believes part of his role is to form a positive relationship with the students, an atmosphere of trust, so that when he does have to punish them they will understand that he is doing it for their best interest and not because he views them unfavorably. “I want them to feel like they can come to me, but still respect punishment.” To achieve this, he often talks to the students and encourages them to think before they react and to consider the results or consequences of their actions. Nonetheless, he stresses that he “tries to stick to the Code,” but at the same time, the Code allows some room for individual judgment and he considers each circumstance separately. Because of this, Mr. O’Neil is viewed by many of the teachers as the softer of the two primary disciplinarians, and general conversations during the study indicate that he and Mr. Hunter understand that they are viewed somewhat differently by both the teachers and the students at the school. More importantly, both are comfortable with the distinction that is made between their personalities. Whether this serves a positive function for the consistent administration of discipline is questionable. As one teacher complained, “I’ll send a student out to Mr. O’Neil, and he’ll talk to them and send them back to me. He’ll tell me, ‘Well, I’ve never seen that student act like that before’ or ‘I’ve never heard him say anything like that.’ I

want to tell him that just because the student didn't say "motherfucker" to you doesn't mean he didn't say it to me."

While certain labels may have allowed some students to push the envelope of acceptable behavior, such as students who were active in school functions and activities or who consistently were high academic achievers yet who were occasionally observed bantering playfully or even somewhat mockingly with teachers or administrators, those labels did not appear to impact any type of punishment meted out at the administrative level. Rather, those students were typically not referred to the administrators in the first place. Their misconduct, when it occurred at all, was handled between the teacher and student, as were many routinely belligerent, uninvolved and sulky students.

On the opposing end of the continuum are the students who are the "repeat offenders," the 5 to 10% to which Mr. Hunter refers or the 30 to which Mr. O'Neil refers, who are continually getting into trouble in the classroom or other areas of the school and who are on a first-name basis with the administrators. For those students, being labeled a troublemaker is an accurate term, even if it is politically incorrect or undesirable. Moreover, the observations during the course of the two semesters bore witness to the repeated defiance and disrespect exhibited by a small percentage of students. For those students as they are nearing the end of adolescence, it is a term which they have embraced. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this study to determine which first occurred – the label or the behavior. Are they now troublemakers because they at one time were casually labeled a troublemaker and it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy, or were they the troublemakers from a very young age who were labeled appropriately? In either instance, the fact remains that only a small number (or percentage) of students at

this school are the students who are repeatedly in trouble for a variety of reasons, and the punishment given out to these students appears to be fair and consistent, from the teachers who often give them “second chances” to the administrators who counsel them, offer them another chance, or assign them to detention, to the ABC room or send them home. The primary exceptions to this rule, if any, are (1) the efforts made to provide alternate disciplinary decisions for Special Education students as noted by an administrator, and (2) as noted throughout this study via teacher comments (but which cannot be substantiated through any administrative observations due to FERPA regulations) relate to the students who have parents who are the complainers, the parents who argue with administrators and demand that concessions be made for their child. The adage “The squeaky wheel gets the grease” appears to play a role in determining whether a child gets sent for administrative discipline, and possibly, what avenue of discipline the administrator chooses when the child is sent out of the class.

NEW STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT MONITORING

In the Fall semester, in an effort to discourage students from arriving to class late, a new tardy-monitoring system had been put into place which required all teachers to shut their doors when the bell rang. Students who arrived to find a closed door were not to be admitted to class until they went to the front desk (which had previously been manned only sporadically by volunteers or by office workers during slow times) which was now fully staffed. The staff member enters the student’s information into the computer system, which prints out a tardy admittance slip and records that the student was tardy. Upon receiving three tardies, a disciplinary action is automatically recorded in the system and the student is given a Saturday Detention date. The administrators view this change

as having a significant impact on student tardiness and on the role of the teacher.

Previously, as reported by one administrator, some teachers did not enforce any type of tardy rule:

Reporting was spotty at best . . . It made the teacher the bad guy. Teachers want to pick their battles, so some would just say ‘they’re here now, so let’s just get to work. The new system provides consistency across the board.

In addition to providing the consistency of enforcement throughout the school, it also frees the teacher from having to write a tardy referral and tracking multiple tardies.

The teacher can focus on academics rather than timely attendance and additional paperwork, which benefits both students and teachers. Similarly, the administrative change in the management of student desk area in the ABC room was done for positive purposes. The administrators are aware that many teachers complain that students simply sleep in ABC, and the purpose of the change was to discourage this habit as it is unlikely that a student could fall asleep comfortably sitting in a small plastic chair. Nonetheless, this change also has the unintended outcome of hindering a student’s ability to perform academic work, a complaint voiced just as often (“I never get any work back from there”) as the complaint of students’ sleeping in ABC (“Heads are always down in there”).

CONCERN FOR STUDENT WELFARE

The administrators are also acutely aware that a student’s home life plays a significant role in determining both their behavior and their academic performance.

During an extended conversation with Mr. Hunter in his office, it was noted that he had a whiteboard on the wall facing his desk upon which he had written extensive notes and his own musings about how to best work with students who are failing. At the top of the whiteboard is the heading asking “WHAT IS CAUSING THE FAILURE?” followed by a

list of what he believes are the problems based upon his own experiences with students and parents. At the top of the list is “Poor Parenting” followed by “No Parents”. Next is “Poor/Income”, then “Food/Clothing/Shelter” and last “Abuse/Neglect.” I ask him to elaborate on the list, and he explains:

Well, there’s a difference between poor parenting and poor student parenting. A parent might be a really good parent, except when it comes to taking care of the child’s educational needs. And that might be because they themselves weren’t that good of a student, or they just don’t see the necessity of the classes, or something similar, but in other respects, they might be a very good parent to the child.

In other instances, he explains, the student truly has no parent present at all. The parents have disappeared from the child’s life for a variety of reasons, and so the child may be homeless, sleeping on someone’s couch, or a relative may have taken them in but may not really be vested in the child’s educational outcome. He also notes that the FERPA laws make it very difficult for the administrators to find out detailed information that would be helpful for the school to know to better meet the child’s needs. Even the simple question of which students receive free lunch is not something they have open access to, so when it comes to the issue of impoverishment, it is often a matter of having to make judgment calls as to whether that is an issue that is causing difficulty for a student. He also shows his ability to empathize with students coming from impoverished backgrounds, and his words convey the true impact and acknowledgement of the value of cultural capital in the educational institution:

I can put myself in their shoes. I came from a fairly poor family myself. I know I wasn’t as smart as I could have been, as I would have been, if I would have had some of those other things that the richer kids had. My parents wanted me to do well, but they couldn’t always give me the things that would have made that easier. That’s why I think there’s a difference between poor parenting and poor student parents. I don’t quite know how to say it. If a kid has parents with poor

educational backgrounds, or who just don't see that connection, then the kid's grades suffer from that.

In a strikingly similar conversation, Mrs. Simpson, the Principal and Coordinator of the Alternative Education Program at the high school, also notes her understanding of the vast importance of the home and school connection. She explains that she was raised by a single mother and was a recipient of free lunches when she was a student. She notes that her own life experiences have made her keenly aware of the difficulties faced by many of the students who are in AEP, emphasizing that impoverishment plays a large role in the frustrations of many students and parents alike:

In the regular high school, everybody has the illusion that life is grand. Here in AEP, our halls are different. Students know that life isn't all grand. The kids who are our top referrals are all low socioeconomic kids. We also have mentally ill kids, and a lot are on meds, but the majority of our students are low SES, and I know from my own life experiences what a challenge that presents for these students. . . Some of our students, their parents can't even afford the four dollar medications that some of the pharmacies have now. For those families, there is constant frustration that they are not able to meet even the basic needs for their children. The parents and the kids both feel the frustrations. So, here in AEP, we understand that these things are not necessarily behavior problems, but they are really poverty problems. When you don't have the money for enough food, for school supplies, for basic items, then the frustration has to come out somewhere.

In the same vein as Mr. Hunter's acknowledgement of the value of cultural capital, Mrs. Simpson stresses its importance and goes on to give partial credit for her educational success to the fact that she had a teacher who recognized that her family wasn't able to meet her educational needs and who took the time to help make her college career possible.

If it hadn't been for my height and speed, I probably would not be sitting here today. We were poor and my mom was single. She had a high school diploma, but she was the only one of her family who had one. I got very lucky that my coach took an interest in my situation and he helped me find the counselors who helped me with signing up for the ACT. My mom had never even heard of the

ACT. He helped connect me with counselors who could help me with admissions applications and getting letters of recommendation. It's so important to have those kinds of connections. Kids in poverty just don't even know how to begin to get that kind of information, unless the school takes a positive approach to help them find it . . . I am very thankful, first that I was tall and good at sports, because we would never have been able to afford college otherwise . . . And second, for that coach, who was willing to go the extra mile.

Mrs. Simpson and Mr. Hunter both make reference to the fact that some parents do not feel comfortable interacting with teachers or school officials due to their own educational backgrounds, and therefore, they may avoid the process altogether. This appears to play a role in Mr. Hunter's distinction between "poor parenting" and "poor student parenting." Mrs. Simpson elaborates on this area:

As for parents, they often times feel that the school is against them . . . Overall, I think parents are maybe a little intimidated by the school, by the teachers and the administrators. Maybe they are not as educated, so they throw up a wall, because they don't feel comfortable talking to you. This is especially true for parents of poverty. They put education on a pedestal. They don't want to feel bad because they can't talk about Algebra with their kids, or with the teachers.

This statement is directly consistent with Lareau's (2000) research which demonstrated that working and lower class parents often defer to teacher recommendations, and often hesitate to participate in functions at the school or attend teacher conferences due to a lack of confidence in their own abilities. Mrs. Simpson points out that with the smaller class sizes and the individual attention that she and her staff can give to the students in AEP, the parents are able to overcome that barrier. She says that the AEP staff has been able to create relationships with parents that foster a sense of security and trust between the home and school, something that has been lacking in the lives of many of their students, and which, as documented by Gregory and Weinstein (2008), is a critical element for effective classroom behavior management.

She also makes mention of the fact that she employs a positive reward system for students just as the PRAISE program does within the regular high school area. She notes, as Mr. Young also mentioned, that the students who are part of AEP (or part of PRAISE) are students who rarely get recognized for any type of achievement and so whenever possible they give out rewards, typically in the form of recognition certificates, sweet treats and “positive postcards” that are sent home on Fridays listing the student’s accomplishments, but occasionally in the form of monetary gift cards and trips to a local pizza parlor, both of which are very meaningful to impoverished students.

When misbehavior occurs (which is often in the halls of AEP), the students are counseled to answer the following questions:

WHAT DID I DO?

WHY WAS IT WRONG?

HOW DID IT AFFECT OTHERS?

WHAT COULD I HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO FIX IT?

By utilizing those five steps, it makes the misbehaving students process their actions.

She goes on to say that only a few days earlier she was going through this process with a student when he said “Wow, I really need to apologize to Mr. W” She describes it as

being like an epiphany for the student. As for other behavior management techniques or

disciplinary actions, she rarely utilizes ABC (“If they’re in ABC, they just sleep”);

instead, she uses lunch detention because in her opinion, students really do not like to

lose the social time that lunch offers. Like other administrators, she utilizes out of

school suspension only as a last resort when dealing with multiple offenses or when she

feels it is vital to send a message to the student. Because AEP is a separate entity, she is

not bound by the same matrix of discipline that is designed by the Site Based Council for

the high school. She says that works well for her because then she can tailor the student's punishment to fit each individual circumstance, which she continually strives to do.

A final area that appears to play a role in the discipline process is the recognition by the administrators at BCHS and AEP that student misbehavior is *sometimes* the result of academic deficiencies. As Mr. Williams, the Math teacher, pointed out, it may be the frustration of not being able to do the required work that becomes the basis for the student's misbehavior. Therefore, the punishment should be weighted with consideration as to why the student chose to act inappropriately. Mr. Hunter acknowledges this issue, relating it specifically to students in the Special Education area rather than the general population of students:

Most [Special Education students] are struggling with reading comprehension, and so they get frustrated and then they misbehave, because they are so far behind academically, they can't read the material, can't do the work, and so they act out in response to that.

Regardless of Special Education status, he emphasizes that when students are failing academically in multiple courses, those are the students who are regularly acting out and causing disturbances. The student can get attention drawn to his or her misbehavior, which deflects from the fact that he or she is intellectually unable to do the work. Rather than admit "I can't do the work," the student can say "I don't know how to do it because I was suspended when they went over this."

Likewise, Mrs. Simpson notes that many of the students in AEP have significant difficulties with reading comprehension which makes it almost impossible for them to succeed in the regular classroom. In the regular high school, the possibility of lashing out in frustration is increased, whereas the smaller and more contained classes of AEP make it easier for them to get caught up academically and return to the regular high school.

The situation outlined above, wherein teachers and administrators view poor behavior as a result of academic failure, provides a contrast to the academic literature which suggests that the relationship lies in the opposite direction. That is, researchers (Gregory and Weinstein, 2008; Ferguson, 2000) emphasize that poor behavior leads to time out of the classroom which then increases the risks of academic failure.

Whether labeled as a behavior problem or tracked into lower-level classes, referred students can miss instructional time, develop a negative academic identity, become truant, or eventually drop out of school (Gregory and Weinstein, 2008, citing Watts & Erelles, 2004; Scott & Barrett, 2004, Newcomb, et al. 2002 and Jimmerson, Egeland, Sroufe & Carlson, 2000).

However, within this particular school, the teachers and administrators are well aware of the risks of students being absent from the classroom and they seek to minimize that to the extent possible. Moreover, they view the misbehavior often as a result of the academic failure (or the sense of failure), rather than the failure being the result of the consequences of misbehavior. This cycle is difficult to break, and the problem has no easy solution: When students misbehave, there must be consequences. As misbehavior continues, the consequences need to be increasingly severe to serve as a deterrent. However, as severity increases, time out of school necessarily increases which correspondingly increases the risks of course failure, grade retention or attrition. (This pattern, and its consequences, will be demonstrated in the following data analysis, highlighting the importance of early intervention efforts such as the PRAISE program to misbehavior).

In the situations where the administrators *do not* feel as if the issue is related to academic frustrations, the answer is often found in the home circumstances of the child, whether it is related to impoverishment, abuse or neglect or simply poor parenting

techniques. Mr. Hunter points out that it has been his experience that some parents indicate to him that they are having the same problems with attitude and defiance at home, and they do not know what to do for the problem either. Other times, the parents make excuses for their children's behavior. And, as noted by many classroom teachers, it is common for the parent(s) of the most troubled students to be the parents who are nonresponsive. While the school is working diligently to find ways to better serve the students, the administrators acknowledge that for the present they are doing the best they can to help every student succeed, whether the student is at the top of the class or the bottom.

Regardless of which situation occurs first, poor behavior or poor grades, the end result of sending students out of the classroom may be viewed differently by teachers and administrators. Teachers may believe that a misbehaving student needs to be sent out of the classroom, not only to send the student the message that the behavior will not be tolerated but also to give the students who are engaged in the academic material a distraction-free environment that is more conducive to learning. Administrators, however, need to factor in the impact that excessive time out of the regular classroom may have on the student's ability to perform well on state-mandated accountability tests which emphasize both individual and school-level performance. Thus, for teachers, suspending a misbehaving student may lead to positive and immediate benefits for the classroom environment, but eventually the decreased academic performance that may result from the time out of the classroom could hinder the school's performance ratings.

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS: DECIPHERING THE DATA

The academic literature indicates that within many school districts minority members and certain other subgroups are subjected to higher rates of disciplinary actions, specifically In-School Suspension, Out-of-School Suspension or Expulsion than other students. The typical student who is suspended or expelled is more likely to be from a lower socioeconomic group, in a special education class, male and a low-achiever (Gregory and Weinstein, 2008, citing Skiba, et al. 2002; Wu et al, 1982; Leone et al. 2002 and McCarthy and Hoge, 1987). Moreover, racial disparities have been documented for over three decades, noting that African Americans were as much as three times as likely to be suspended as a white student (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Ferguson, 2000; Skiba et al. 2002; Gregory and Weinstein, 2008; Gregory, Skiba and Noguera, 2010). The long-term consequences of repeated disciplinary actions are also well documented in the literature. Citing Gregory and Ripski (2008:338):

Suspended students are more likely to have low achievement (Arcia, 2006), be retained (Civil Rights Project, 2000), receive future suspensions (Skiba and Noam, 2002), and experience dissatisfaction and alienation (Lovey, Docking & Evans, 1994). Moreover, suspended students are at risk for long-term negative outcomes. They are more likely to drop out of school, become involved in the juvenile justice system, and later be incarcerated (Baker, et al. 2001; Civil Rights Project, 2000).

Because of these concerns, objective summary data from the PRAISE monitoring program and two separate months of the academic school year was analyzed to determine if these problems were evident at Bramble County High School. The data is important for purposes of this research given that classroom observations and interviews with the teachers failed to indicate evidence to support discrimination at this school. Therefore, it is possible that the discrepancies shown in the Kentucky data, which shows significant

gaps in disciplinary actions and outcomes, is occurring more across schools than within schools. That is, larger and more urban school systems with a higher percentage of racial minorities or students lower in measures of socioeconomic status may discipline at such high rates that it makes it appear that the problem is systematic.

Within this particular school, based upon the observations, behavior concerns were more pronounced in classes with low achievers and those which contained a large number of students identified as Special Education students. It did not appear that teachers were making any intentional decision to discipline any racial group or social group any more than others. This section will examine selected portions of the quantitative data made available to the researcher to review the school-wide data rather than just the selected observed classes. This is helpful because the teacher participants were self-selected, and it is possible that teachers who see themselves as more fair and who are generally more confident in their teaching methods would have been the ones more likely to participate with this study.

With respect to the PRAISE monitoring and behavior management program which has been outlined in earlier portions of this analysis, its effectiveness is indicated by a cursory review of summary data provided to the researcher. Specifically, the data provided a summary of the number of referrals for each student being monitored during the first three grading periods (for a total of twenty-seven weeks) of the academic year, the number of specific disciplinary actions for each student and the students' GPA. During the 2010-11 academic year, the PRAISE program was actively monitoring the behavior and academic performance of twenty-six students, three of whom were girls and the remainder were boys. Eight (30.76%) of the students were minority members and the

remainder (69.23%) was white; nineteen (73.07%) were designated as Special Education students and seven (26.93%) were general education students. (See Chart 1).

The choice of which students to actively monitor is made at the administrative level, based upon the students' past academic performance and behavioral history in middle school and ninth grade. Efforts are made for teachers to not be made aware of which students are designated as PRAISE-monitored students, but due to the tight-knit community of this school, teachers often become aware of the status regardless of efforts made for that information to not be revealed. The PRAISE educators will work with any student at the school, if needed, and their assistance is often requested in classes which are overcrowded or which contain a large number of students who consistently display inappropriate behaviors. The effectiveness of this early intervention is suggested by a review of the disciplinary referrals given to students who are actively being monitored by PRAISE. During the first nine weeks of the school year, an average of 6.0 referrals per student was recorded. During the second nine weeks, the average number of referrals had dropped to 4.60 and by the third nine weeks, the average number of referrals had dropped even further to 2.77. From this, an indication is given that early intervention may lead to improved behavior and fewer events that necessitate referrals. During that same time, the average number of days of in-school suspension dropped from 2.7 to 1.3 per student and then raised somewhat to 1.41 per student. Out-of-school suspensions ranged from an average of 0.7 days during the first nine weeks to 1.18 days during the third nine weeks, which can be explained by the escalation of consequences as some students continue a pattern of misbehavior. Thus, although the average number of referrals declined dramatically, from 6.0 to 2.77, the average days of out-of-classroom

consequences did not change proportionally. Fewer referrals were written, but the average of those consequences remained high. (See Table 1).

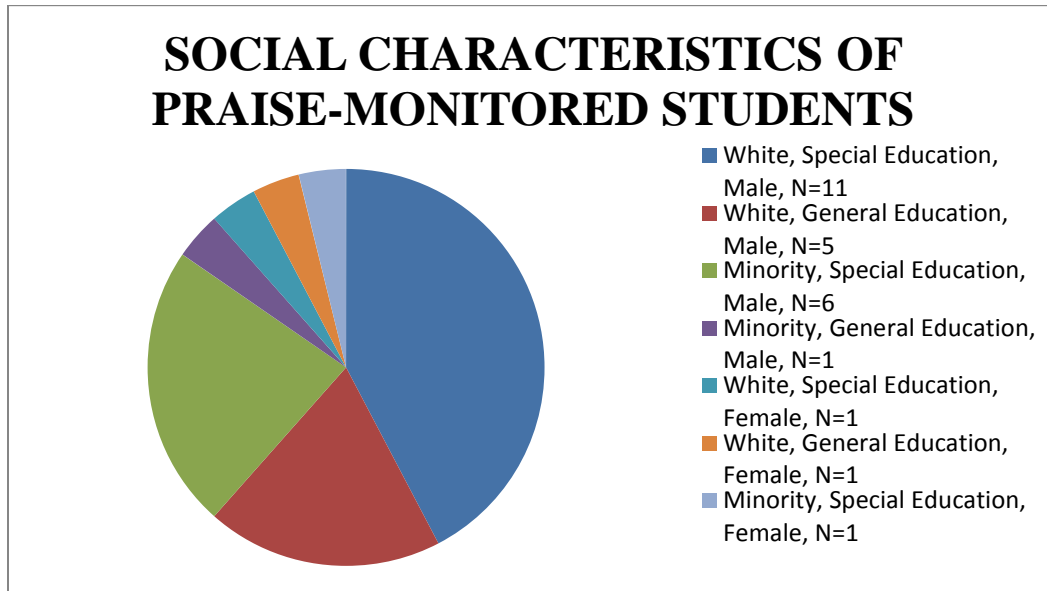


CHART 1

DISCIPLINARY AND GPA DATA OF PRAISE MONITORED STUDENTS FOR THE FIRST THREE GRADING PERIODS, 2010-11

	First Nine Weeks	Second Nine Weeks	Third Nine Weeks
Average Number of Disciplinary Referrals	6.0	4.6	2.77
Average Number of In-School Suspension Days	2.3	1.3	1.41
Average Number of Out-of-School Suspension Days	0.8	0.7	1.18
Average GPA	1.5	1.1	1.3

TABLE 1

“Johnny” and “Stevie” provide an example of this pattern: During the first nine weeks, Johnny received a total of sixteen referrals, almost two per week. During that

time, he received a total of five days of in-school suspension. The remaining referrals were handled with lesser (undocumented in this data set) punishments. Johnny's total GPA during this first nine weeks was 0.5 (on a traditional 4.0 GPA scale). The second nine weeks, while Johnny's total number of referrals dropped to eight, this time he received no in-school suspensions, but instead received two days of out-of-school suspension. His GPA declined to 0.4 this nine weeks. Johnny is not included in the data for the third nine weeks, as he did not return to the school for the second semester; whether this is related to academic failure, the escalation of behavior problems, involvement with juvenile justice or relocation on the part of the family is not known. "Stevie's" data provides yet another example of this series of events: During the first nine weeks, he received eleven referrals, which resulted in a total of six days of in-school suspension. His GPA was 2.0 for the first nine weeks. During the second nine weeks, he received only nine referrals, earning him five days in the in-school suspension room and one day out-of-school suspension. His GPA dropped to 1.2. In the third nine weeks, he received even fewer referrals, six, but those six events resulted in a total of five days of in-school suspension and three days out-of-school suspension, which is consistent with the Code of Conduct discipline matrix. His GPA for the third nine weeks dropped to 0.4. Both Johnny and Stevie's disciplinary events are directly consistent with the academic literature referenced herein: as time out of the classroom increases, the risks of academic failure increase, along with the potential for dropping out of school altogether. It is also important to note that among the twenty-six students being actively monitored by the PRAISE program, the average GPA over the three nine weeks ranged from a high of 1.5

to a low of 1.1, barely above the passing line for a D. Many students had grade point averages well below passing.

Moving from the PRAISE program's limited data to schoolwide data, two separate months of data will be briefly examined. Data from the main Bramble County High School and the adjacent Alternative Education Program are combined in the school's official disciplinary reports. Referrals are handled by Mrs. Simpson at AEP and by Mr. Hunter and Mr. O'Neil within the high school. (A third administrator, Mrs. Mayfield, was hired by the school during the 2011-12 school year, but she did not participate in the observation and interview portion of this research. Her disciplinary data is included with the following official data).

The months of March and the following September were chosen because those months represented the months of each semester which did not contain any snow days, holidays, professional development days or Spring/Fall Break. Thus, a clearer picture of what occurs in the school might be available when examining an uninterrupted month when students are continually confined to the academic arena with no breaks other than weekends. The two months of data will be reviewed separately, primarily because the school began a new method of recording and punishing tardies during the Fall semester. Thus, the numbers and percentages of students given In-School Suspension will vary, as will the numbers and percentages of students being assigned to Saturday Detention, the new method of tardy punishment. Additionally, the type of data made available to the researcher differs significantly. During the month of March, student identification numbers were made available which makes it possible to analyze how many of the students were "repeat offenders" during the month. During September, there are no

unique identifiers associated with the data so it is impossible to know how many individual students are reflected in the data or how many referrals each individual student received during the month. It should be recognized that this brief data analysis is not intended to be a full review of disciplinary referrals and outcomes; it is referenced to provide an added layer of support for the conclusions reached based upon classroom observations and interviews with the participating educators.

During the month of March, a total of 489 referrals were made to the administrators, representing 276 students. Generally consistent with the estimates of the administrators that a select few are the routine troublemakers, twenty-two students (8%) were sent to the office on four or more occasions and an additional twenty-seven (10%) were sent to the office on three occasions. The remaining students received only one or two referrals each, with the majority of those being referred for tardiness or skipping class. Among the students with four or more referrals during the month, three students received eight referrals. Because this is the largest number of referrals received by any of the students, this large number deserves further exploration.

The three students who received eight referrals each were white boys. One was referred for two incidences of bullying, two instances of being rude/discourteous, two instances for tardiness, once for defiant behavior and once for skipping. Another received four tardy violations, two skipping violations, one policy violation (undefined) and one instance of defiant behavior. The third student with eight referrals skipped school four times, was tardy on three occasions and had one referral for defiant behavior. The misbehavior was not limited in scope; instead it ranged from being late to class to leaving school, from being defiant to displaying rudeness toward authority, to general

violations of school policy and bullying other students. Students such as these, as well as the remaining nineteen students who made their way to an administrator's office during the month of March on four or more occasions, represent the students who are in serious need of behavior modification and management, who are at an increased risk of finding themselves referred to the juvenile courts and who are at high risk of academic failure.

With respect to specific categories of offenses, the categories involving missed classes received the most referrals, with one hundred twenty-eight referrals being written for skipping and eighty-three written for tardiness. An additional eighty-six referrals were written for disruptive behavior, with defiant behavior resulting in another seventy-five. Miscellaneous policy violations (which would include a variety of offenses such as public displays of affection, use of cell phones during unauthorized times, being found in the hall without reason, etc.) resulted in fifty-eight referrals. The sixth most populous category was rude/discourteous, which led to twenty-four referrals. Other offenses occurring during the month included bullying (7), cheating (1), failure to serve detention (9), fighting (5), theft (2), and tobacco violations (11). There were no legal violations during the month of March. (See Chart 2).

POLICY VIOLATIONS, MARCH 2011

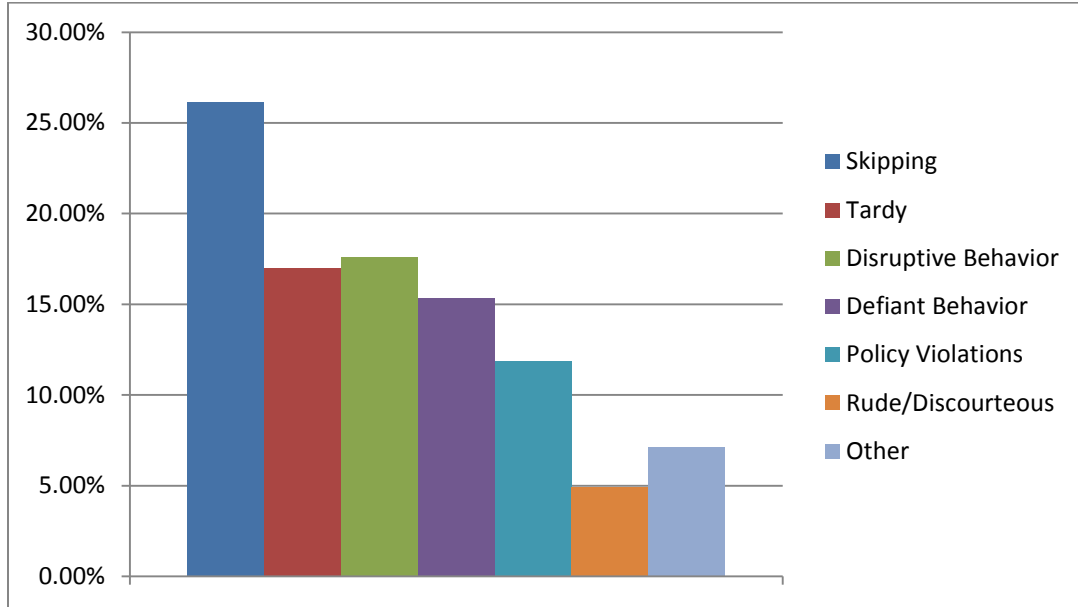


CHART 2

When considering whether minority members are overrepresented in referrals and harsher outcomes, comparisons can be made in a variety of ways. During the month of March, although there were 489 referrals written, the school data contained formal resolution results for 390. The remaining 99 referrals did not contain information of any type of disciplinary outcome, an omission which is believed to be due to clerical error. For that reason, the following discussion of discipline which makes reference to the outcomes will not include the 99 events which did not contain a formal resolution in the data file. The omitted data occurred across the board and does not appear to be intentional or systematic; of the missing resolutions, 67 of the 99 cases involved white students and the remaining 32 involved minority students.

The most common resolution during the month of March was for the student to be assigned a day of In-School Suspension, with 153 offenses being resolved through assignment to ABC. Sixty-six were ordered to attend Saturday Detention, while another

sixty-three students were assigned to After School Detention. Thirty-three were given warnings, thirty-one were resolved with parent conferencing, eight students were suspended from riding the bus, and thirty-six were given a period of time of Out-of-School suspension. (See Chart 3).

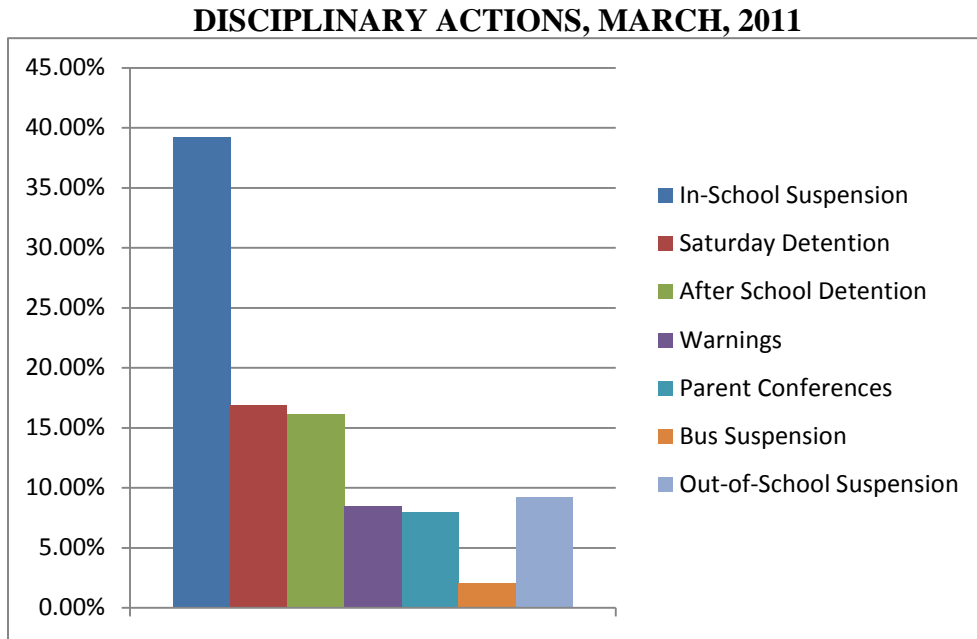


CHART 3

Bramble County High School’s total minority membership is currently just under 14%, consistent with percentages found in many rural areas of Kentucky. Of the total referrals, 86 of the 489 (or 17.59%) were given to African American students, 21 (or 4.29%) to biracial students, 14 (or 2.86%) to Hispanic students, 2 (or .41%) to Asian students, with the remaining 366 (or 74.85%) to white students. Thus, minority referrals (collapsing all minority students into a single category) were somewhat higher (25.15%) than would be expected if their offending occurred at rates consistent with their percentage of the student body (14%). A similar pattern emerges when considering some (but not all) disciplinary actions, and it must be remembered that some resolutions indicate a positive outcome for the student, such as phone calls to the parent or detention,

both of which are mild outcomes, rather than a more severe punishment such as suspension.

Seventy-three percent of students assigned to After School detention were white and twenty-seven percent were minority; seventy-seven percent of the students assigned to ABC (In-School Suspension) were white and twenty-three percent were minority; eighty-one percent of those given out of school suspension were white and nineteen percent were minority; eighty-one percent of parent conferences were parents of white students and nineteen percent were minority; seventy-one percent of students given Saturday detention were white and twenty-nine percent were minority. Of the thirty-three students receiving formal warnings, thirty-one (or 93.94%) were white and two were minority students. Among students who were suspended from the bus for a period of time, sixty-three percent were minority and thirty-seven percent were white. Thus, although the student body is approximately eighty-six percent white, a slightly lower percentage of white students were given formal negative punishments for misbehavior (leading to overrepresentation of minority students), but minority students were also overrepresented among the outcomes which could be viewed in a positive light, such as a parent conference or detention rather than being suspended. (See Chart 4).

RACIAL DISTRIBUTION OF DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS, MARCH, 2011

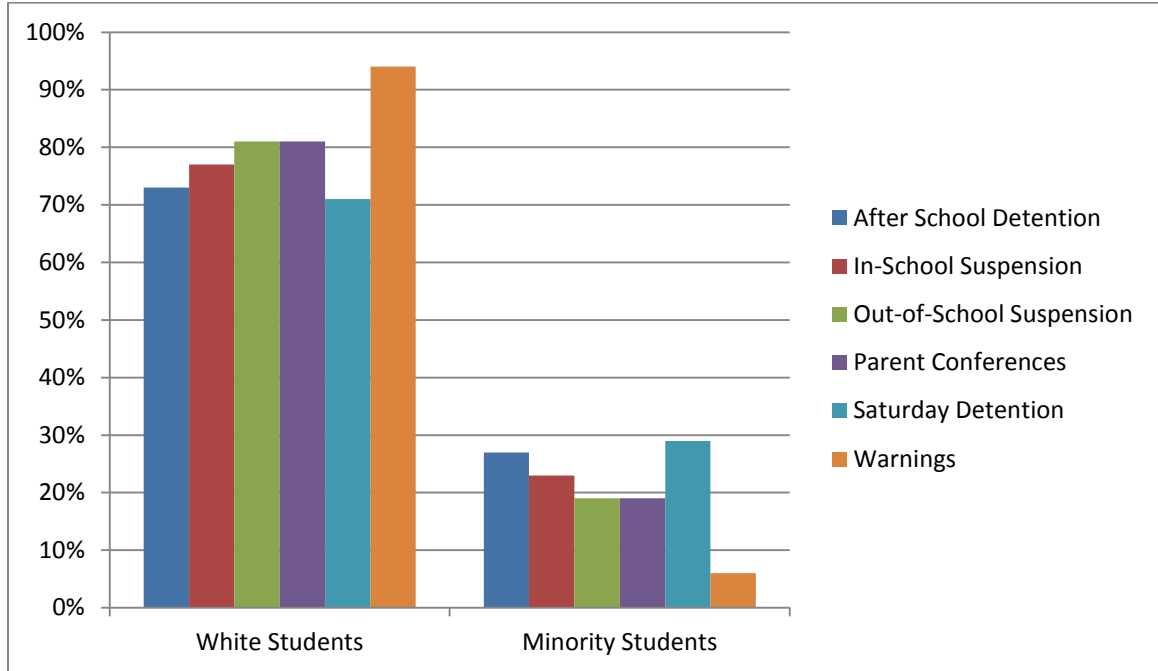


CHART 4

Cross-tabulation of data of Disciplinary Actions by Race likewise does not indicate any discriminatory behavior at the administrative level (See Chart 5). Considering only the data where outcomes are given, and collapsing the data of minority students into a single category which includes all African American students, bi-racial students, Hispanic and Asian students, 18.68% of the minority students were given After School Detention, compared with 15.38% of white students. Saturday school suspensions differed somewhat, with 21.97% of minority students being assigned to Saturday detention, compared with 15.72% of white students. With respect to assignment to ABC (the In-School Suspension Room), 38.46% of minority students were given time in ABC, compared to 39.46% of white students. For out-of-school-suspension punishments, minority members were slightly less likely to receive this punishment during March: 7.7% of minority students and 9.7% of white students were

suspended from school. Other outcomes of referrals in March included sanctions such as being given a warning, suspended from the bus, or parent conference, with 13.19% of the minority students receiving one of those forms of punishment, compared to 19.74% of white students. (An unknown variable could lead to deviation in any of these outcomes, specifically how many times the students had been in trouble in previous months. That data is not available.) These percentages are largely consistent, particularly with respect to in-school suspension, and they validate the statements of both administrators as to their attempts to treat all students equally and fairly. To re-quote Mr. Hunter: “If I’m a Son-of-A-Gun all day long, I’m at least a consistent Son-of-A-Gun.”

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS BY RACE, MARCH, 2011

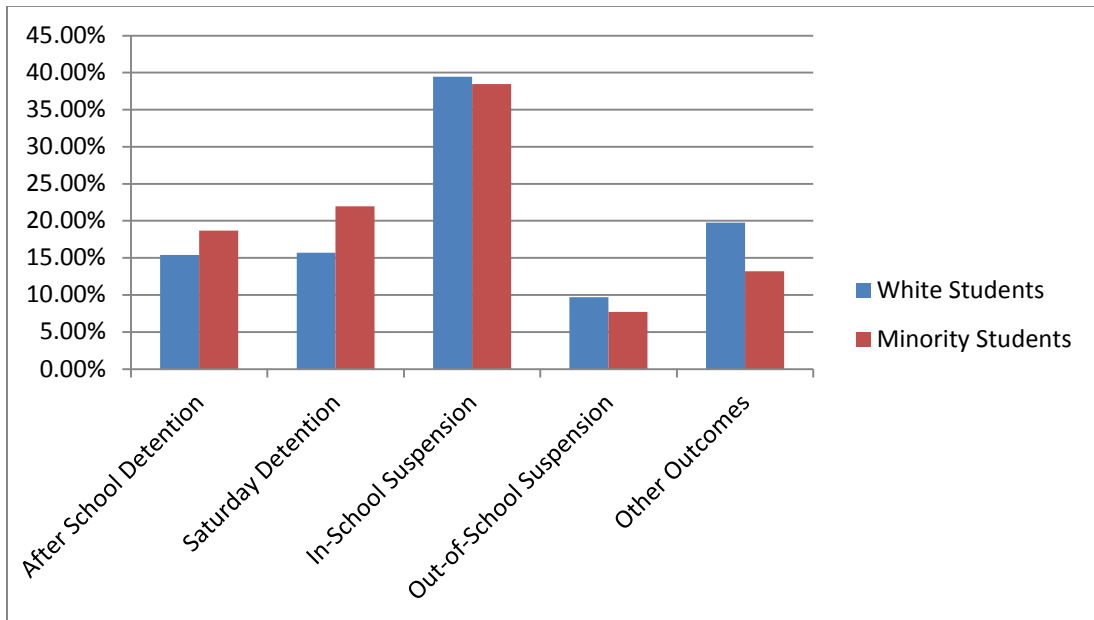


CHART 5

A third layer of cross-tabulation, Violation by Race by Disciplinary Action (once again omitting the cases where outcomes are not known), also indicates consistency across racial groups. Of the minority students referred during the month of March for defiant behavior, 50% were sent to after school detention, 16.6% were sent to ABC, 25%

were given out of school suspension and the remaining 8.4% were resolved through conferences with the parent. Among white students, 40% were given after school detention, 22.2% were sent to ABC, 15.5% were given out of school suspension, 13.3% were given Saturday detention and the remaining 6.6% were handled with parent conferencing. (See Chart 6). Thus, with respect to defiant behavior, an event which is often mentioned in the literature as one of the areas where minority students are overrepresented in the disciplinary data (Skiba et al. 2002; Gregory, Skiba and Noguera, 2010; Monroe, 2005), during this particular month it could be argued that in *some cases* the minority members received lesser punishments than the whites. In particular, a larger percentage of minorities were assigned to after school detention (which can be construed as a mild punishment) and resolved through parent conferencing, while a larger percentage of whites were given in-school suspension than minorities. At the same time, however, a higher percentage of minority students did receive out-of-school suspension.

Overall, no evidence of any intentional discriminatory behavior at the administrative level emerges between white students and minority students. To the degree that minority students may be overrepresented in the disciplinary process, it is occurring at the referral level. Approximately one of every four referrals at the school is written to a minority member, while minority students comprise only 14% of the student body. This could be a result of social class differences more so than race, stemming from a cultural mismatch between students and teachers or the direct effects of poverty. Minority members are more likely to live in impoverished circumstances which oftentimes are a contributing factor in poor academic performance and high levels of frustration (which may be expressed through defiance and disrespect), as noted by

teachers and administrators alike. At the national level, however, even when controlling for social class status, minority overrepresentation remains a concern:

Existing school discipline research suggests that student SES is limited in its explanatory power of the racial discipline gap. Whether statistically controlling for a measure of SES at the school level . . . or at the student level . . . multivariate analyses have repeatedly demonstrated that racial differences in discipline rates remain significant (Gregory, Skiba and Noguera, 2010, citing McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wallace et al. 2008; Raffaele Mendez et al. 2002; Wu et al; 1982 and Skiba et al. 2002).

**DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS, DEFIANT BEHAVIOR, BY RACE
MARCH, 2011**

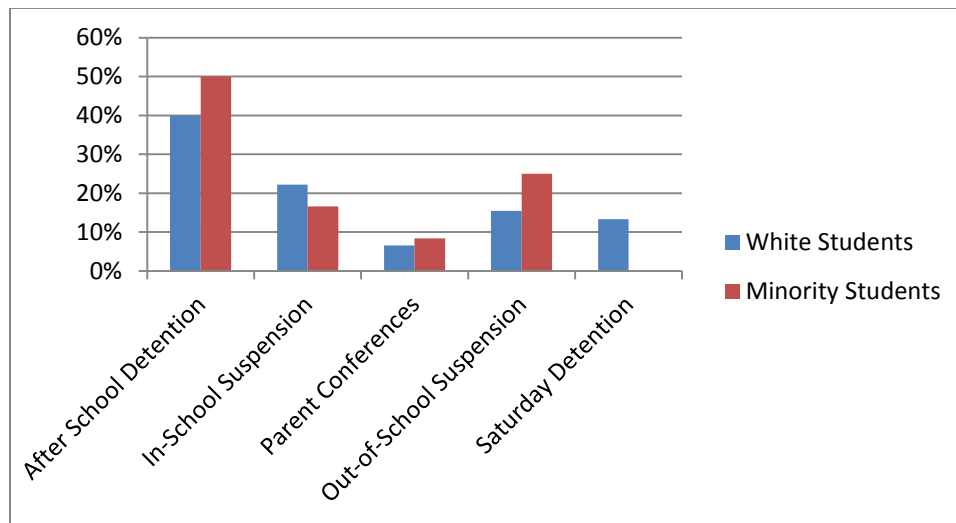


CHART 6

For purposes of this research project, it is not possible to cross tabulate the data by socioeconomic status because the school’s data report does not contain information on free lunch status of the students, nor is that data available on an individual basis to the administrators. Instead, reliance must be made on the social/cultural capital displayed by the student in their everyday interactions at the school to glean insight into his or her social class status. While it may be accurate to believe that a large percentage of the African American and Hispanic students at this school are at the lower level of the social class ladder, it is just as accurate that a large percentage of the impoverished student body

are white. Many of those impoverished students, both white and minority, were seen in lower-level academic courses as well as being identified with special needs. It was in those classes that misbehavior was most pronounced and it was in those classes that teachers were continually struggling to manage behavior and return the students' attention to the academic material at hand.

Because many of the referrals may have originated in classes such as those, to the extent that some of those students may have been minority members, then it follows that minority members may eventually be overrepresented in the disciplinary outcome data. In and of itself, that should not be construed as an indicator of racial discrimination stemming from the teachers or the administrators, but as a result of (1) student apathy or student frustration, both of which may lead to displays of defiance or other disruptive behavior or (2) as a result of teacher frustration in which a single student may be the one called out for punishment after a series of students have acted out in a short period of time (Vavrus and Cole, 2002). Moreover, the overcrowding of some classes, the mixture of students within any class, and the assignment of students to classes to which they may feel are not relevant to their future lives may exacerbate the misconduct and which are situations that are beyond the original control of the student.

As previously noted, to the extent that minorities are overrepresented in this school's data, it appears to be originating at the classroom level. For example, again referencing the category of defiant behavior during the month of March, 73.4% of the referrals were given to white students, an underrepresentation, while 26.6% of the referrals were given to minority students. If the defiance was not definite and overt, and instead was a matter of subjective interpretation, then this may indicate the problem of

cultural mismatch: verbal intonations and body movement that is normalized within the minority community may be construed as defiance on the part of the white teacher (Ferguson, 2000). This does not indicate any type of discriminatory treatment directed toward an individual student or group of students, but instead points to the need to understand cultural differences and practices within the home environment that may carry over to the school. As the behavior continues, and the same students receive multiple referrals, then the punishment becomes more pronounced, leading to the gap in the data.

In contrast with the literature, which argues that “Educators’ unwillingness to draw distinctions between severe and minor offenses and the breadth with which zero tolerance approaches are applied appear to be primary sources of the problem” (Monroe, 2005:47, citing Skiba and Peterson 1999), the conclusion from this particular school is that the teachers and administrators *do* make efforts to draw those distinctions, but within some classrooms, the teachers are being pushed to the limit of their ability to maintain order. At the administrative level, the administrators attempt to give individual consideration to each student, based upon comments and interviews with those in charge of discipline. However, if the Code of Conduct discipline matrix is construed as a form of “zero tolerance,” meaning that as offenses are repeated and referrals are multiplied, then the corresponding punishment must also be increasingly severe, then it stands to reason that if minorities are given more referrals at the classroom level (which does appear to be the case at this school), if the administrators are adhering to the discipline matrix, then those students will have correspondingly higher levels of more severe punishments, including both in and out of school suspension.

Returning to the data, during the month of September, 442 disciplinary referrals were written, 302 to white students (68.32%) and 140 to minority students (31.68%). The largest category of disciplinary referrals originated with tardiness, with eighty-three referrals related to tardiness. With the new electronic monitoring tardy system, however, tardiness automatically culminates with an assignment to Saturday Detention generated electronically after three tardy events are recorded. Failure to Serve Detention was the second largest category in September with sixty-nine referrals, some of which may be explained by students not reporting as required for Saturday Detention following tardiness; many of the punishments for Failure to Serve Detention escalated to In-School Suspension. The third largest category of violations was Skipping Class, with fifty-nine referrals, followed by Defiance of Authority, with forty-seven referrals, and then Non-Compliance with Classroom Rules (a category designation not given during the previous school year and which could include multiple types of misconduct that may vary by teacher) with thirty-seven referrals.

As in March, referrals to minority students were higher than would be expected based upon their percentage within the student body. During this month, almost 1 of every 3 referrals went to a minority member, up from 1 of 4 in March. Within the category of defiance of authority, 23.4% of referrals were written to minority students and 76.6% to whites; for disruptive behavior, 37.04% of referrals were given to minorities and 62.96% to whites; for non-compliance with classroom rules, 27.03% of referrals were issued to minority students and 72.97% to white students, and for disrespect to a school employee, 44.44% went to minorities and 55.55% went to whites. (See Chart 7). It must also be recognized that because of the low number of referrals

within each of the various categories of offenses, statistical interpretation can be misleading.

REFERRAL CATEGORIES BY RACE, SEPTEMBER, 2011

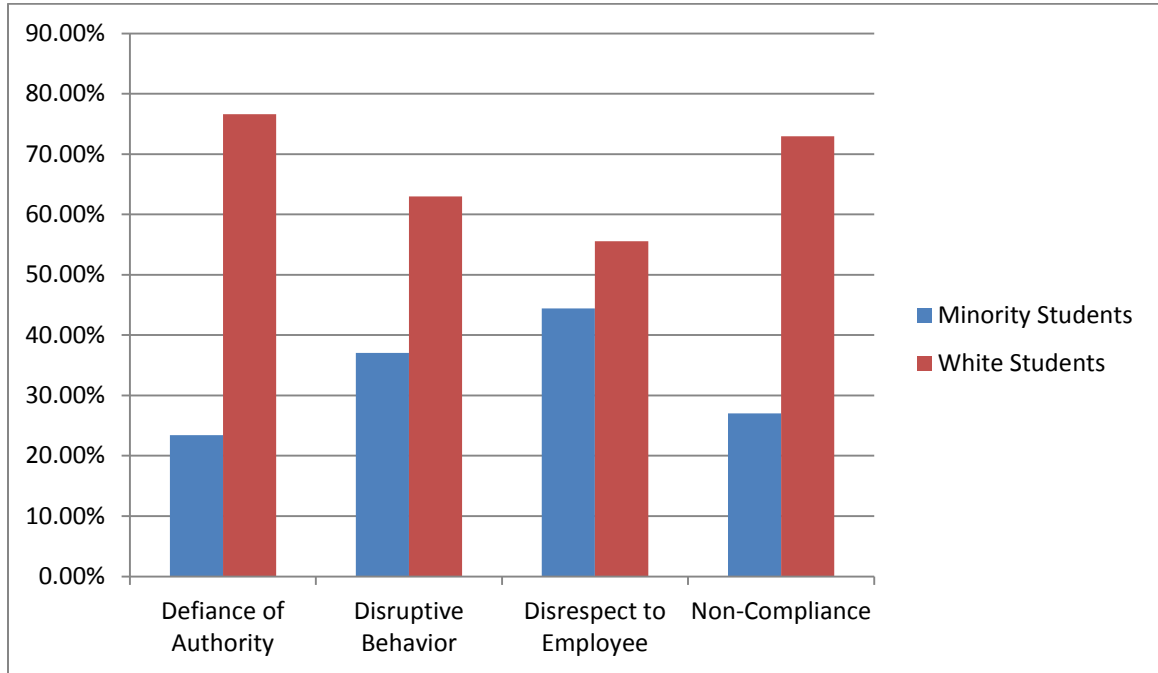


CHART 7

This last category, disrespect to a school employee, provides useful insight into the nature of escalating consequences and the dangers of misrepresentation of statistical information. The total number of referrals for disrespect to a school employee was nine, four of which were minority student referrals and five of which were white student referrals. Among the five white students, one (20%) received Saturday school, two (40%) received detention and two (40%) received in-school suspension. For the four minority students, however, the punishments differed: one (25%) received detention; two (50%) received in-school suspension and the fourth (25%) received out of school suspension. A quick glance at only the percentages could quickly lead to the conclusion that minorities are being punished more severely. A higher percentage received in-

school suspension, and one was suspended from the school campus while no white students received such a harsh punishment. However, from a numerical standpoint, which may serve as a guide to the administrators, they saw an almost equal number of whites and minorities (5 to 4) and within each group a variety of outcomes were given: detention, in-school suspension and out of school suspension. If the minority students received more referrals over the course of the semester or school year, then for the minority student who received the out-of-school suspension, it may be that it is simply time, according to the discipline matrix, for his or her punishment to be warranted. White students, on the other hand, who may be more likely to only have one or two referrals over the course of a semester, will still be on the lesser end of the continuum of punishment. This does not, in and of itself, indicate any type of racial discrimination at the administrative level, regardless of the inferences that could be made from looking solely at numerical data. It is this concern that is addressed by triangulating the numerical data with qualitative research through observations and interviews.

It is a well-settled matter that girls tend to offend at lower rates than boys. Tracking juvenile justice back into the 1960s, the male to female juvenile offender rates were 6 to 1. Over the ensuing fifty years, girls have made great strides in every area of life: socially, academically, and professionally. The pattern of catching up with boys is not always positive, however, as the male to female juvenile offending ratio nationwide is now 2.5 to 1, a significant increase over decades past. Disciplinary data of girls within the educational system at the statewide level indicates a similar pattern where girls comprise approximately 29% of the students receiving disciplinary actions. The pattern found at Bramble County High School is generally consistent with statewide data.

During the month of March, of the 489 referrals written, 363 (or 74%) were written to boys and 126 (or 26%) were written to girls. During the month of September, of the 442 referrals, 349 (or 79%) were written to boys and 93 (or 21%) were written to girls. These ratios, of somewhere between 4:1 to 3:1 appears consistent with the observations made during this research project with respect to a general trend of female tardiness, disrespectful tones and misbehavior within the classroom compared with male behavior.

The month of March contains identifying information which can be used to determine how many of these students, both girls and boys, received multiple referrals. Narrowing the data to look at only the students with four or more referrals during the month of March, of the twenty-two students receiving that amount, only two were girls (both white). One girl was referred once for cheating, once for disruptive behavior and twice for skipping, while the other was referred once for defiant behavior, twice for skipping and once for being tardy. As with their male counterparts, their forms of misbehavior were varied. An additional seven girls were given three referrals each during the month, four of whom were white, two African American and one Hispanic. Between the total twenty-one referrals these seven girls received, seven were for disruptive behavior, three for defiant behavior, five for skipping, five for policy violations and one tardy. Five of the seven referrals for disruptive behavior went to two African American girls, one who received three and the other who received two; and two of the three referrals for defiant behavior was given to one African American girl. As mentioned previously, the small numbers upon which this present research data is based is not large enough to warrant statistical analysis as even small variations will lead to

significant discrepancies in percentages. For this reason, charts depicting data have not been provided, as those have the potential to be misleading.

DISCUSSION

A general discussion of the differences in discipline is warranted, however, notwithstanding the small numbers upon which the data is based. The larger number of referrals for blatant disrespect toward authority tends to validate the statements of some teachers who participated in this study who mentioned the “attitudes” of some African American girls at the school. This framing of African American girls behavior as an “attitude” is consistent with both the works of Ferguson (2000), and with the work of Morris (2007), wherein he references one teacher’s comment at his research site as referring to a group of African American girls not as “ladies” but as “loudies.” Morris (2007:501) found that the discipline of African American girls often “stemmed from perceptions of them as challenging to authority, loud, and not ladylike.” To the small extent that race was mentioned by teachers in the present study as a factor related to disciplinary problems, the findings are consistent with Morris’ (2007) work. While teachers were quick to point out that they were unconcerned with a student’s race, the issue of the “attitude” of African American girls was mentioned by three of the participating teachers. While the observations did not show a continual pattern of disrespect exhibited among African American girls, a few did indeed push the envelope of acceptable conduct on a regular basis. However, the same could be said for a few white girls who also demonstrated poor behavior patterns on multiple occasions. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the African American girls’ behavior was framed

as somehow related to the fact that they were African American while for the “loud” white girls, it was framed as an individual problem.

During the month of September, although unique identifiers are not available to determine how many referrals any specific girl received, the data indicates that of the 93 referrals written to girls, twenty (or 21.5%) were written to minority students and seventy-three (or 78.5%) were written to white students. This represents a slight overrepresentation among minority girls, but this should not be interpreted as a sign of discriminatory behavior in and of itself, as only 13 of the 93 referrals were for subjective offenses (such as defiance of authority, disruptive behavior or aggressive behavior toward an adult) while the remaining 80 were for objective misbehaviors, such as skipping class, theft, or use of profanity) which are not open to interpretation.

Narrowing the events which precipitated the referrals to only the subjective events, minority girls received four referrals (30.76%) during September while white girls received nine (69.23%). Thus, as in March, the subjective nature of the teachers’ interpretation of what constitutes defiance or an “attitude” may be deciphered, as noted by Ferguson (2000), using a racialized key. Once again, a limitation of this data is the small number of events upon which this analysis is based. Additionally, the actual context in which the misbehavior occurred is not known to the researcher.

One teacher who participated in the study made the following observation, demonstrating the intersections of gender, race, place and socioeconomic considerations within the educational system. Not only do her words provide a good summation of the variables that play a role in misbehavior, but her choice of words also convey the sense that the teachers are at a loss for how to change the situation:

With the girls, it's their tone, just bitchiness, if you'll pardon the phrase. And with the African American girls, some of them are large, and they'll push people around. . . . I don't care what color you are, or where you're from, you're not going to disrupt this class. I don't know what makes the difference. They [the minority students] just seem to have more problems. Two or three of them in first period give me problems every day, but there is another African American boy in the class who never gives me any problem. Every student is different, I know. The African American kids that act out are from poor backgrounds, so could it be more of a socioeconomic thing, sure, but there are lots of poor white kids too. In one of my classes, there's this particular group of boys, and they are nice enough farm kids, but they talk too much and act out.

As the administrators come to know these students through their everyday interactions and observations, these factors inevitably play a role in their decision-making. However, they appear (based upon this research project) to be working toward consistency and fairness in their application of discipline at this high school.

The primary themes which emerged during the course of this research and which have been outlined in the foregoing chapters include (1) the variety of approaches that teachers utilize to manage misbehaving students; (2) the perceptions that teachers have regarding the students' and the parents' attitude impact their responses to students; (3) the teachers' awareness of the home and school connection impacts decision-making; and (4) the teachers' lack of belief in the efficacy of the school's in-school suspension program impacts their willingness to give referrals to misbehaving students. Components of these themes include the differences found between the management of boys and girls; the differences in the forms of misbehavior between academic levels; and the display of cultural capital and the impact thereof on reactions to misbehavior. The conclusions drawn from these research findings are summarized in the following chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS, STUDY LIMITATIONS, & SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research project was undertaken as a qualitative field study to observe teachers' perceptions of student conduct and their reactions to misbehavior. A review of the academic literature suggests that Labeling Theory and Reproduction Theory work simultaneously within the educational system to predispose some students to receive more sanctions than others, whether one is considering general classroom management techniques or formal administrative disciplinary actions. Labeling Theory and Reproduction Theory are important components of this study: both appear to be factors in the disciplinary process, although this study found more support for the tenets of social reproduction than labeling. This project aims to rectify the gap in the literature by seeking to understand the underlying processes through which educators decide when and how to administer sanctions for misbehavior, identifying factors which impact the decision making process, both at the classroom level and the administrative level.

The following discussion will relate findings in the literature with respect to labeling, cultural capital and social reproduction, cultural mismatches, minority overrepresentation, gender differences, and successful disciplinary methods to findings at this school. As the literature is reviewed, conclusions from this study will be set forth to provide a picture of the disciplinary process at this high school in rural Kentucky. The limitations of this study will then be reviewed, followed by suggestions for future research.

SUMMARY DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Brym and Lie (2003) note that once a child becomes labeled as a troublemaker, it subjects that child to higher levels of scrutiny which correspondingly increases the opportunities for the label to be validated. While sociological research utilizing labeling theory typically relates to the problems associated with negative labels, the present research indicates that within high schools a variety of labels are attached to students by the educators, some of which lead to a positive perception of the student. To the extent that labeling existed among the teachers, it appeared to consist of the following subjective categories: (1) Athletes or otherwise “involved” students, (2) Honors Students, (3) Mean Girls, (4) Farm Kids, (5) Special Education Students, (6) General Students and (6) Troublemakers. These categories are not meant to be mutually exclusive nor do they indicate a pervasive system of labeling students; rather, they are intended to indicate the groups to which teachers made reference during conversations throughout the study. Regardless of the terminology that teachers or administrators used to describe groups of students, those labels did not appear to result in any group other than the “troublemakers” receiving admonishments or referrals at a higher rate than other students. To the extent that labels played a role in determining teacher reactions to student misbehavior, it appears to operate by allowing high achieving students or highly involved students a greater degree of latitude of freedom within the school (which at least one teacher indicated she believed those students had earned). Meanwhile, students with a record of misbehavior and prior punishments are not treated any differently than the “average” or “general education” student. As for those who are the “troublemakers,” as described throughout this analysis, their behavior warranted referrals and disciplinary actions.

Moreover, it often appeared that *more* disciplinary corrections should have been given to many students, indicating that some teachers are willing to accept a substantially higher level of defiance, disrespect and passive resistance than that which should be expected of teachers. This issue, of not providing swift and consistent enforcement of the rules, can be detrimental to the educational process as well. As noted in an earlier portion of this paper, the teachers who participated in this research project tended to align themselves either with a strict discipline policy or a negotiable policy, and those who had the strictest policies generally found themselves with fewer behavioral issues in the classroom.

While labeling of the students did occur, it was not found to be an arbitrary process nor, in the case of the few chronic rule-breakers, to be unwarranted. Labeling occurs through an unintentional process simply due to student performance, attitude toward authority, level of involvement within the school, parental involvement and support, and prior knowledge of and interaction with the student. Teachers were aware, through no intentional actions of their own, which students came from higher social status backgrounds based upon clothing and shoes worn by the students and, in some cases, personal grooming habits. Nonetheless, this study did not confirm the implication that knowledge of those things impacted disciplinary decisions. More often, the case appeared to be that the teachers were distressed by the lack of motivation among the impoverished and troubled students, although teachers occasionally commented that some students, even high achievers, carried themselves with a sense of entitlement.

Students who have socially constructed their reality in such a way that they see no relevance to the educational process or the long-term benefits of a high school diploma or post-secondary education seem to be making concerted efforts to underperform in the

classroom. This was demonstrated on multiple occasions in the classrooms which were comprised of lower-level academic courses such as general Algebra (where overt misbehavior was common) and in some general English classes (where disinterest was sometimes shown, most commonly by placing one's head on the desk or by actually falling asleep). These students were heard on multiple occasions during both semesters of research to explain away their missing homework with a variety of excuses, and some did no work even during class time when there was ample opportunity to get the work done. Instead, they were heard to tell the teacher(s) they were not planning to do the work, some signing forms acknowledging their choice to receive a zero for the assignment. Even when the teachers encouraged them to get the work done, students still declined to do so.

Some teachers indicated that the students were exercising personal choice, and given that they are near adulthood, they must learn to accept the consequences of their choices. From a sociological viewpoint, it must be remembered that individual choice is never entirely free, but is always determined to some extent by the environment. It is the responsibility of the educational system to attempt to bring the student into compliance and to foster a relationship with the child which would help the student see the necessity of education. This appears to be occurring at this high school, as the teachers and administrators who participated with this research continually made mention of their efforts to achieve these goals. At the same time, however, teachers mentioned their feeling of frustration when some students (and some parents) appeared to reject their attempts to help, potentially impacting the teachers' willingness to continue to offer assistance in the face of continued rejection.

Individual students were mentioned to this researcher at various times during the project, indicating that teachers were aware of personal struggles often associated with the child's home life and that the teachers were handling those concerns to the best of their ability. Some students were clearly seen to be at a disadvantage with respect to the acquisition of cultural capital, where symbolic displays of their social status were sometimes evidenced by their unkempt hairstyles, or clothing which was tattered or in need of laundering, and in their manner of speech with authority figures, where the value of respect for authority was sorely lacking. Nonetheless, the lack of cultural capital did not appear to lead to intentional derogatory labeling on the part of the teachers, a finding which may be associated with the rural aspects of this high school where many individuals come from a working class or lower class background, sometimes associated with farming, and which is a function of this community in general.

The end result of academic and social frustration (whether stemming from the effects of poverty or the effects of perceived or real labeling or discrimination) may sometimes be defiance, disrespect, tardiness and truancy, ultimately leading to the writing of referrals which may be followed by disciplinary actions taken against the student. It is important to note that the academic literature (Ferguson, 2000; Monroe, 2005, citing Hanna 1988; Weinstein et al. 2004; Weinstein et al. 2003) supports the idea of a cultural mismatch between students and teachers. For example, overlapping speech (common among African Americans) may be interpreted as disrespect by a white teacher, or posing a command as a question (common among the middle class) may not be interpreted as a true command by a lower class child (Delpit, 1995; Gregory and Weinstein, 2008). Thus, given the large number of referrals which were written for defiance and disrespect,

whether a cultural mismatch might be in operation at this school is a valid question. The observation portion of this project did not *fully* support this suggestion, as the types of defiance and disrespect which were witnessed tended to be overt, with little room for cultural variances. For example, directing curse words toward an authority figure is disrespectful regardless of one's social class or racial background. Nevertheless, differences in body language, verbal intonations and speech patterns which are commonly referenced in the literature as differing between whites and minorities (Delpit, 1995; Ferguson, 2000; Monroe, 2005) were witnessed at this school, and those may be a contributing factor to the writing of referrals for subjective misbehaviors.

These differing patterns of interaction may be a contributing factor to the behavioral and academic shortcomings found within the classes of lower-academic track students, and may contribute, in part, to the labeling of some students as the "troublemakers." For example, it was common to hear the teachers at this school make repeated *requests* of the students for a particular behavior to occur, as opposed to issuing direct *commands* for it to happen. Delpit (1995) explains that this process may occur absent any intentional bias on the part of the educators. Indeed, it may occur when the teacher intentionally attempt to *resist* displaying power, believing that a more conducive atmosphere to learning is one in which power is more evenly distributed, a belief that is more commonly accepted among those with higher levels of educational attainment and occupational prestige. Children from working class or lower class backgrounds, regardless of race, hear direct commands within the home, placing them at a disadvantage when they are in a different setting where commands are less direct (Delpit, 1995, citing Heath). Teachers at this school who routinely utilized exacerbated levels of politeness

(by phrasing commands in the form of a question or as a general statement preceded by “please”) toward students who were *already* the ones misbehaving did not benefit by receiving any heightened compliance from those students. In those cases, a cultural mismatch (not of racial differences, but of social class differences) may be in operation: children from lower social class status tend to receive commands which are clearly stated (“Don’t do that!”) as opposed to it being directed as a question (“Would you please not do that?”) (Delpit, 1995; Ferguson, 2000). For example, a principal explained to Delpit (1995) that students were routinely sent to the office for disobeying teachers’ directives, yet when the parents were called, they reported to the principal that the children were well-behaved at home and that they were told to do what the teachers says: ‘If you just tell them what to do, they’ll do it.’ (Delpit, 1995:35). Herein lies the heart of the problem: there is a difference between *asking* someone to do something and *telling* them to do something, a fact which may be missed by middle-class educators who are unfamiliar with the differences in communication styles between social classes. When the teachers’ requests for compliance are ignored, referrals may be written, leading to time out of the classroom, potential labeling of the students, and compromised academic achievement. To alleviate this, the teachers might benefit from studying the interaction styles common among working and lower class homes as a tool to utilize in their classrooms when dealing with belligerent adolescents. Additionally, this school might give consideration to providing teachers with seminar instruction focused on the concept of cultural mismatches, both social class and racial, to enhance the teachers’ understanding of this issue and provide them with explicit strategies to overcome this disconnect between students and teachers.

The academic literature also points to the need for students to feel as if the teacher has legitimate authority (Delpit, 1995; Gregory and Weinstein, 2008). For the teacher to be seen as the legitimate authority figure within the classroom, the student must trust that that the teacher has earned that power. This can occur through the process of relationship-building by being responsive to the students' needs and through the direct exercising of that power by being demanding (Gregory and Weinstein, 2008) through the demonstration of high expectations for both good behavior and academic achievement. This demandingness is a feature common among working and lower-class homes, where children (regardless of racial heritage) are exposed to displays of authoritativeness requiring compliance to the explicitly-stated rules (Delpit, 1995). When expectations are not explicit, or the work not rigorous, children may live up to what they perceive to be lowered expectations, both socially and academically (regardless of whether they actually *are* lowered), becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Gregory and Weinstein (2008:458, citing their 2004 work), found:

[t]he greatest academic growth for adolescents from low socioeconomic backgrounds was predicted by a teaching style characterized by a combination of high demandingness *and* high responsiveness, as perceived by the student.

It appears, based upon the observations and interviews, that many teachers at this school do attempt to forge relationships with the students, getting to know them as individuals rather than just as students in the classroom. While this adds to the level of trust, students must simultaneously interpret the teacher's requests for compliance as true directives for the requested behavior. It is at this point in the process that there seems to be some breakdown between teacher expectations and student response, a finding which is consistent with the foregoing discussion of cultural differences in communication and

disciplinary styles. Moreover, it was most commonly witnessed in classrooms which were lower-level academic courses, consistent with the presumption that lowered academic rigor is associated with the students' interpretation of the lowered academic expectations for them. As their academic performance suffers, their misbehavior increases, possibly as a form of self-protection.

In an effort to alleviate this problem, the school could offer seminar instruction that focuses on the importance of rapport-building. As noted in a prior section of this paper in a comment by Mr. Young, some teachers are lacking in this area, which may in part be a reflection of the time period when the teacher originally began his or her teaching career. Seminars that focus on these areas that intersect – cultural mismatches, social class differences in discipline and the importance of forging student-teacher relationships as a way to enhance student engagement and academic performance – could provide a dual benefit to the school through increased academic performance and decreased classroom misbehavior.

The academic literature (Foster, 1993, citing Spencer, 1986) also speaks to the issue of minority teachers and whether their interactions with students of color or lower social class status students differ from their white counterparts. One of the teachers who volunteered to participate in this study was a long-term substitute, a soft-spoken African American teacher named Ms. Greene. This teacher, who was observed throughout the spring semester when she was employed at the school, was witnessed to be an extraordinarily understanding and patient teacher, treating all students fairly and consistently. Nonetheless, she remarked that she was dismayed by the disrespect displayed by the students in the school, an attitude that is clearly at odds with her value

system. This does not, however, negatively impact her treatment of the students; if anything, it appears to strengthen her resolve to remedy the misbehavior through the process of reflection.

Ms. Greene confided to me that her son had attended an urban high school with a majority of minority students, and that she was always shocked, as a parent, by the attitude of the teachers at that high school. “You wouldn’t believe the things you would hear them utter in the halls,” she explained. Recognizing this pejorative attitude toward minority or lower class students and the damaging effects it can have on student morale, she explained that she made conscious attempts never to label a child as being incapable of success based upon their social location. Moreover, she remarked that it was her belief that the teachers and administrators at this school all took steps to ensure that did not happen. She explained that compared to the urban high school, the atmosphere at Bramble County High School was entirely different. “You don’t hear things like that over here,” she remarked. Her patience with the students, both academically and behaviorally, was remarkable. She held her students, even those who were underperforming, to a high standard, insisting that they were capable of succeeding. She sometimes shared their work with me, beaming with pride at their accomplishments. Her willingness to engage the students in conversation and forge a connection with them was always apparent even when the students were misbehaving which was common in her classroom. The academic literature (Gregory and Weinstein, 2008) suggests that this type of approach – her demandingness that they *can* do the work coupled with her efforts at relationship building -- should be very effective in gaining students’ trust and earning their respect for her authority over the class. Unfortunately, this process is made all the

more difficult for Ms. Greene, as she is the third teacher in this classroom this year, a fact that she believes has significantly contributed to their poor behavior and academic performance. Her limited time in the classroom does not provide an adequate opportunity to determine how her teaching and disciplinary strategies would work were she to be with the school for a full academic year or more. Whether Ms. Greene is representative of minority teachers in this school district is not known. At this high school, regularly-employed minority teachers simply were not seen; while the school employed minority administrative and custodial staff members, the primary educators were white. Therefore, increasing the racial diversity of the teaching staff at BCHS could be seen as an area where there is room for improvement by the school district.

The findings of Vavrus and Cole (2002) provide insight into the referral process which appears, based upon the observations, to occur to some degree at Bramble County High School. Vavrus and Cole's (2002) study highlighted the problem of deciding which student would be sent for disciplinary action following a sequence of events within the classroom. Their study indicated that typically several students would be engaged in misbehavior, but only one would be singled out for consequences. In some instances, this did appear to be the case at this high school, particularly in the classes which contained lower-academic level students or Special Education students. Rather than one student acting out, a series of events in which several students would make comments, laugh inappropriately or otherwise interrupt the flow of class would culminate in the teacher calling the PRAISE educators to come to the class to talk to only one or two students. Similarly, the twine incident described in an earlier portion of this analysis, in which several students engaged in the misbehavior led to the writing of a referral for only

the one student who instigated the incident. Thus, a teacher's perception of a student, based upon prior knowledge of the student, racial stereotypes or preconceived ideas about that student based upon his or her presentation of cultural capital, may impact who gets the intervention more so than the actual level of misbehavior the student is displaying.

The academic literature suggests that minority members are at higher risk of serious disciplinary actions than white students (Skiba et al. 2003; Gregory, Skiba and Noguera, 2010; Ferguson, 2000; Gregory and Weinstein, 2008), implying bias on the part of teachers and administrators when deciding which students to refer out of the classroom and when deciding which form of punishment is warranted. The observations conducted at Bramble County High School do not substantiate the conclusions reached by various researchers that institutional discrimination is rampant within the educational system. The teachers appeared to treat all students respectfully, even when students were not returning that respect, and many of them gave students ample warning to correct their behavior before moving to the step of a referral to an administrator. Although a few teachers demonstrated an authoritarian attitude within the classroom, requiring strict compliance to the rules, others often negotiated with students to correct their misbehavior. Teachers of both disciplinary methods did not appear to draw any distinction between minority members and white students. Had these observations occurred in a short amount of time, one might argue that the teachers had changed their habits for purposes of the study. However, this research project unfolded over the course of two semesters, making it highly unlikely that any of the teachers employed that tactic, nor did any of the teachers particularly appear to monitor their responses to misbehavior in my presence.

Conversations held informally and during a final interview likewise did not lead to any comments being made which would indicate prejudiced attitudes, although three teachers did specifically mention an area of concern among African American girls, specifically noting that within the school there a “couple of groups” of African American girls who used their body language and verbal tone to intimate “smaller white teachers.” Finally, the quantitative data does not indicate any serious overrepresentation of disciplinary actions against any single group at the school-wide level. And, as previously noted, in some instances minority students received more lenient outcomes than whites.

Overall, no evidence of any intentional discriminatory behavior at the administrative level emerges between white students and minority students. To the degree that minority students may be overrepresented in the disciplinary process, it seems to originate with the referral process. Approximately one of every four referrals at the school is written to a minority member, while minority students comprise only 14% of the student body. As discussed herein, this may be the result of a cultural mismatch or an effect of poverty. This research, at this rural high school in Kentucky, does not support the research (Skiba et al. 2003) which indicates that even when controlling for social class, racial bias remains. It may be that quantitative data across schools, particularly when including larger, more urban schools, makes it appear that the problem is systemic; but within this school, this does not appear to be happening.

With respect to gender differences, along with the foregoing reference to African American girls, several teachers commented on the mean-spiritedness they felt many of the girls exhibited toward one another and toward female teachers, regardless of race. During the observations, this mean-spiritedness was sometimes noted, typically in the

form of overheard conversations in which the girls would monitor and comment on the choice of clothing, hairstyles and makeup used by girls who were not a part of the group engaged in conversation. Derogatory comments were common, but those were not a source of disciplinary recourse and as such were not a focus of this study. Nonetheless, as noted previously, on one occasion in Mrs. Black's class, an African American girl even chose to vilify a character in the film being shown. To wit: "She needed to be gone, she was so ugly." Additionally, several girls engaged in behavior that closely approximated the same behavior engaged in by boys in their friendship group, particularly with the use of foul language.

Considering informal sanctions, girls were somewhat more likely to be admonished to be on-task with their work, with teachers routinely monitoring their work habits during class to a greater degree than that which was given to boys. The primary exception to this rule was found in the classes which have been described herein as the troubled classes, where much of the misbehavior was male misbehavior, and as such, in those classes, the teacher's attention was almost exclusively heaped upon the boys due to necessity. In many instances, the teachers' comments indicated that they saw these male behaviors as a show of masculinity, although teachers differed in their opinion as to whether the boys acted in the rambunctious manner in an attempt to elicit female attention or to prove their masculinity to other male students. Girls were also scrutinized more closely than boys with their clothing choices, with girls being told on various occasions that their skirt was too short, or their top was too low-cut, while boys were more often reprimanded for non-sexualized violations of the dress code. Girls who were too vocal in class were quick to be called down, while boys seemed to be given a greater

amount of freedom in their levels of vocalization and boisterous activity. Presumably, teachers were making a judgment call as to what constituted “ladylike” behavior and enforcing those expectations on the girls. At the same time, boys were allowed “to be boys.” This situation allows for the continued replication of gender scripts and perpetuates the sexual double standard. Moreover, as the girls recognize this inequality, they may react through resistance to the authority of the teacher in the form of active defiance, or by developing a lowered belief in the legitimacy of the teacher’s authority which may further undermine the teacher’s efforts at behavior management.

The overwhelming majority of teachers who participated in this study made mention of issues that students have to deal with outside the school. This study demonstrates that teachers and administrators alike at this particular school are aware of the academic and social problems associated with poverty or troubled home lives, and they are striving on a daily basis to enhance the academic performance of all students regardless of social background. Thus, even though the teachers often times are aware that students come from troubled backgrounds, they do not discriminate against those students when deciding whom to reprimand or whom to send to an administrator. Moreover, many teachers indicated through their words and their actions that they tried to weigh the impact of impoverishment when dealing with individual students. In this sense then, it could be argued that more favorable consideration is given to students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds because of the recognition of risk factors. At the administrative level, poverty is viewed as a potential cause for tardiness and truancy, defiance of authority and refusal to work. The administrators take this into consideration when they counsel students and attempts are consistently made to keep the students in

school. Thus, poverty may serve as an explanatory factor for some misbehavior, but it is not allowed as an excuse.

Some teachers made reference to the specific locale of this study, a rural area of Kentucky, which led them to conclude that some students, specifically boys, saw themselves as “farm kids” and therefore did not put forth much effort into academics because they did not envision college in their futures. Because of this, they believed that some of the “farm kids” misbehaved at a higher degree than their peers who were seeking to advance to college. Teachers routinely noted that some of the students were from families who had lived in the area for multiple generations, working on the land, and that some of those students had even told the teachers they were not concerned with school because they were just going to work on the farm. (In one remarkable conversation, the teacher reported that a boy had stated he was going to “grow pot with his dad” after graduation). At the same time, while poverty is a known risk factor for misbehavior, on the other side of the continuum is the recognition that some students come from more affluent or well-connected families which appears to allow these students the freedom to deviate from the norms of acceptable behavior to a slightly higher degree than students without these connections. This conclusion is based solely on teacher comments, as confidentiality regulations limited this study to observations within classrooms and common areas of the school, while conversations between parents and administrators, or directly between administrators and students during the disciplinary process, was prohibited.

Ultimately, the disciplinary process is much more complex than one might expect. Misbehavior is viewed under multiple lenses including prior knowledge of the student,

the academic record of the student, the level of parental involvement, the form of misbehavior and how often it occurs. The student, likewise, brings his or her own perceptions into the school and bases his or her behavior upon perceptions of expectations, socially and academically. These perceptions may come from a variety of sources, including the student's home life, past interactions with various educators, comments shared by other students about a particular teacher's tolerance level for misbehavior and the teacher's personality. Past and present experience with a teacher may influence a student's decision about the legitimacy of a teacher's claim to authority which will then impact the behavior of the student. If students reject the teacher's authority, a pattern of misbehavior and disciplinary actions may occur. As noted by Morris (2005:28):

[S]trict social control from school officials can provoke resistance from students, which causes the school to perceive them as deserving even more discipline (citing McNeil 1986). This cycle often produces disengagement from school. When cultural capital and bodily discipline relate to race, class, and gender (as they invariably do) this can reproduce these inequalities by generating students who feel out of place in schools, or oppose them.

The elements of cultural capital and gender expectations operate simultaneously to play a role in teachers' and administrators' perception of individual students. Although the literature (Lareau, 2000; Lareau, 2003; Morris, 2005) suggests that a lack of cultural capital may lead to more negative outcomes, the findings of this research project indicates that while teachers do make the connection between their most-troubled students and a disadvantaged home life, they are actively seeking to avoid labeling these children as "troublemakers" based on social location. Many teachers offer "second chances" or attempt to contact parents before issuing a referral, and the administrators

weigh their understanding of the student's background in an effort to try to help the student become successful, both behaviorally and academically. Although the Code of Conduct discipline matrix is closely followed, attempts are always made to keep students in the classroom with suspension being used as a last resort. With that in mind, this school has not adopted a strict code of discipline that necessitates an absolute action for specific events; the administrators have some room for personal judgment to be used in their administration of punishment for misbehavior, as does the administrator at the Alternative Education Program who is not bound by the Code of Discipline matrix at all. Because the AEP is a separate entity from the high school, the disciplinary actions given at that school can be considered on a case-by-case basis, a method which allows an extra layer of support for the most troubled students at the school and which can serve as a way to reduce the number of suspensions and referrals by choosing alternative punishments over ones that might be required under a strict Code of Discipline.

It is the conclusion of this researcher that Bramble County High School teachers and administrators are striving to help students become successful as they make the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, basing many of their disciplinary decisions on their knowledge of individual students and their circumstances rather than a "one size fits all" disciplinary approach.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of this study derives from the method itself, a qualitative case study conducted at a single high school in the state of Kentucky. While statewide data indicates a pattern of minority overrepresentation of disciplinary actions, this school was found to have this concern to a limited degree, and only related to a few disciplinary

outcome categories. In other instances, as noted above, minorities were overrepresented among the group of students who received more lenient outcomes rather than harsh punishments. Thus, to the degree that this school's data does not substantiate statewide findings with respect to minority overrepresentation, it cannot conclude that the statewide data is inaccurate, nor should that inference be made. At the same time, however, the qualitative method provides valuable insight which cannot be obtained by merely reviewing numerical data. Specifically, it demonstrates the process used by teachers when determining that a student has crossed a final boundary of acceptable behavior, or how an administrator weighs various factors into the disciplinary process. As the project unfolded, consistent with a grounded theoretical approach, it became apparent that many other factors weighed into the disciplinary equation than just the acts of misconduct themselves.

Additionally, it must be remembered that this project involved only one high school, and even within that high school, only twelve teachers, three administrators, two program coordinators and one guidance counselor participated. The educators who did participate were self-selected; thus, to the degree that those teachers represented the teaching body as a whole is not known. For example, although the PRAISE coordinator referenced "a few" teachers who seemed to be unconcerned with student outcome and who were only there "to teach the subject," none of those teachers appeared to be among those who participated in the study. Thus, teachers who are more open-minded and fair may have been the ones who were most willing to volunteer to participate in this study.

The specific region of Kentucky in which this high school was located may not be representative of the state as a whole. For example, the reported percentage of students

receiving free lunch in this county is significantly lower than the state average, and as such, the student body (and its potential for misconduct commonly related to socioeconomic conditions) is not representative of the state as a whole. However, the minority representation at this school is consistent with statewide percentages. At the same time, minority membership at this school is significantly divergent from public schools in urban settings across the nation, where minority membership may sometimes reach well into the ninety-percent range. Thus, experiences of those students nationwide, and the experiences of the educators who work in those schools, are likely to be quite different than that found within this lesser urbanized area of Kentucky.

Another limitation of this study relates to federal privacy concerns covered under the FERPA regulations. Although observations of students allowed the researcher the convenience of inference, those inferences could not be followed up by a review of any student's academic or behavioral records. Thus, when a student was observed to misbehave on one or multiple occasions, other than the observations and teacher comments, there was no way to validate that student's past history of misbehavior, which likely played at least a small role in administrative decisions.

Finally, the protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board strictly forbade any instances of the researcher being allowed to observe an administrator during the disciplinary process, which could have added an extra dimension to the considerations that are made by the administrators and also allowed insight into the manner in which different groups of students were managed.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Replicating this study in various schools across Kentucky, or in various geographical areas across the United States, could be helpful to determine if some schools are doing a better job at removing elements of prejudice and discrimination in their daily disciplinary decisions. While the conclusions reached by this researcher -- that Bramble County High School has succeeded in this mission, or is at the least doing a better job than some other schools based upon the quantitative data -- replications of this study could identify other schools that have a good record of working with troubled students to decrease the percentage of students who are misbehaving and receiving disciplinary punishments. Other trends could also be substantiated (or refuted), such as the teachers' concerns that a significant shift in apathy has occurred among students in general, or that parents are more willing to blame the school rather than blame the child for misbehavior and academic shortcomings.

Another avenue to consider for future research would be to replicate this study with an added layer of student involvement. Students could be selected for interview purposes, so that their views could also be voiced. Specifically, the students could contribute their views as to whether teachers and administrators are consistent, or whether they perceive that they show favorable treatment to certain groups of students. When adding this layer of student contribution, emphasis should be placed on selecting a diverse group of students, including those who are witnessed to be the "troublemakers" and those who are on the other side of the behavior continuum; those who are in Honors courses and those who are in general education courses; those who appear to come to school equipped with social and cultural capital and those who do not; along with the

typical demographics of boys and girls, and minority students and white students. By adding this dimension to the project, which was precluded from this study by time constraints and the institutional approval process, a fuller picture of perceptions and reactions could emerge.

As educational ethnographer Peter Woods (1983) has noted, research projects such as the present study can help bridge the traditional gaps between theory and practice. It is the hope of this researcher that this project provides a clearer picture of the process of discipline, giving voice to the teachers and administrators who are entrusted with our children on a regular basis, so that the complex issue of management of adolescents in the classroom can be better understood.

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