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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
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Academic Segregation: The Criminalization of “Mediocrity”
and the Institutionalization of Ethnic Capital

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Sociology

by

Sean Jackson Drake

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Jennifer Lee, Chair
Professor David A. Snow
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Assistant Professor Jacob Avery

2017

DEDICATION

To

Panya, Alya, and Renée

in recognition of their patience, support, and love

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Academic Segregation: The Criminalization of “Mediocrity” and the
Institutionalization of Ethnic Capital

By

Sean Jackson Drake

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2017

Professor Jennifer Lee, Chair

This doctoral dissertation engages with the following sociological themes and theories: educational inequality; the criminalization of youth in ways that advance the interests of dominant institutions; the ways in which immigrants’ ethnic capital and cultural frames of success affect assimilation processes, trajectories, and mainstream institutions. I draw on over two years of fieldwork at two dissimilar high schools in “Valley View,” an affluent, ethnoracial diverse Southern California suburb with highly-rated public schools. “Pinnacle High School” is a meticulously maintained, nationally-ranked comprehensive high school, while neighboring “Crossroads High School” is a stigmatized continuation school where Black and Latino youth are grossly overrepresented among the student body. Students are sent to Crossroads when they have fallen behind in their coursework such that they are no longer on normative time to graduate. While researchers have linked the continued segregation of schools to the racial and class segregation of neighborhoods, I unveil institutional practices that result in school segregation in an affluent, racially diverse Southern California suburb independent of the forces of residential segregation. Pinnacle High School embraces a collective interpretation of

academic achievement – what I refer to as an *institutional success frame* – in which advanced classes, top grades and test scores, and admission to a prestigious university are routine. Students who fall short of these standards are marginalized, and those who struggle academically are sent to nearby Crossroads High School. At Crossroads, students encounter a metal perimeter fence, spotlight towers, constant surveillance by local law enforcement, classrooms housed in trailers, and a curriculum that curtails their post-secondary enrollment options. I refer to this separate and unequal schooling as *academic segregation* – school segregation predicated on academic standing. Correlatively, the overtly carceral treatment of students at Crossroads represents a *criminalization of mediocrity*.

CHAPTER 1

UNEQUAL SCHOOLING AND RACIAL DISPARITY IN AN INTEGRATED, AFFLUENT COMMUNITY

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that a system of “separate but equal” schools for Blacks and Whites was “inherently unequal,” thus ending de jure segregation in American schools. Yet, despite this pivotal decision, De facto segregation in American schools continues (Clotfelter 2004; Charles 2003; Fiel 2013; Orfield 2001; Orfield and Eaton 1997; Reardon and Owens 2014). Previous research has linked racial segregation of schools to the persistent racial and class segregation of neighborhoods (Bankston and Caldas 1996; Bischoff 2008; Bifulco and Ladd 2007; Denton 1995; Goldsmith 2009; Rothstein 2014), and a large body of scholarship details the substantial challenges faced by Black and Latino students in racially segregated, low-income neighborhood schools (Carter 2005; Johnson 2014; Logan et al. 2012; Mickelson 2001; Oakes 1990). However, the features and causes of educational inequality in affluent, privileged suburban contexts have not received much scholarly attention (Khan 2011; Lewis-McCoy 2014). Furthermore, though many studies of educational inequality take a comparative approach by analyzing the disparate school conditions and opportunities between students living in different, racially segregated neighborhoods (Lewis 2003; Shedd 2015), school segregation also exists *within* neighborhoods.

Building on previous studies of school segregation and resource inequality, I draw on over two years of fieldwork at two dissimilar high schools in “Valley View, California” – an affluent and ethnoracially diverse suburb with a large concentration of recent immigrants and

low levels of residential segregation (Logan and Zhang 2011). I compare two public high schools – “Pinnacle High School” an elite comprehensive high school with a student body that is predominantly Asian and White, and “Crossroads High School,” a continuation school where the student body is disproportionately Black and Latino. Students are sent to Crossroads if they fall behind on their course credits at a comprehensive high school, or if they transfer to Valley View from another district and are unable to receive credit for classes that they have completed elsewhere. Whereas public school segregation and the criminalization of youth are typically associated with residential segregation and an uneven distribution of resources, I unveil institutional processes independent of residential segregation that result in school segregation and student criminalization in this affluent and racially diverse Southern California suburb.

Over the following pages in this chapter, I provide a thick description of my field sites, an overview of my data and methodology, a review of the extant literature that informs the study, and descriptions how each chapter speaks to and advances prior, relevant scholarship.

SETTING THE SCENE: A TALE OF TWO DISPARATE HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE SAME AFFLUENT SUBURB

Although levels of racial segregation in American schools have remained high in the decades since *Brown v. Board*, what has changed is the demographic makeup of the American student population, resulting from contemporary immigration. In 1954, approximately 84% of American high school students were white and 16% were predominantly Black (United States Census Bureau 1960). Today, the ethnoracial makeup of American children reflects America’s new diversity: Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians comprise 51.7%, 15.8%, 23.7%, and 5.1% of high school-age children, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics 2013).

Immigration has changed the terrain of ethnoracial diversity in American cities and schools.

Valley View – my field site – is an affluent suburb in Southern California. In 2010, the median household income was \$92,663, and 66% of adult residents had earned a Bachelor’s Degree or higher. (By comparison, in 2010, the median U.S. household income was \$51,371, and 32% of U.S. adults had attained a Bachelor’s Degree or higher.) The U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated Valley View’s 2014 population at 248,531 – a 17.3% increase since 2010 – and the ethnoracial composition of the city reflects broader contemporary immigration flows in middle-class California cities: Valley View is predominantly White (45%) and Asian (39%), but also has a sizeable Latino population (9.2%) and a small Black population (1.6%).

I compare two public high schools in Valley View – “Pinnacle High School” and “Crossroads High School” – that are divergent in their socioeconomic, academic, and ethnoracial profiles and reputations. Pinnacle is the flagship high school in the city, and consistently ranks as one of the top fifty public high schools in the nation. Their top ranking is reflected in their high school exit exam rates, graduation rates, and the percentage of graduates who attend four-year universities immediately following graduation. Ninety-six percent of Pinnacle’s graduates enroll in post-secondary institutions, and 60% attend four-year colleges and universities. And the school’s academic profile grows more impressive when one considers that Pinnacle enrolls nearly 2,500 students each year, with class sizes routinely approaching 40 students. Pinnacle High School sits on a sprawling 55-acre campus, with meticulously manicured greenery and impressive school structures that rise above dozens of neatly pruned trees. Pinnacle boasts a theatre/auditorium, gymnasium, baseball field, football field, all-weather track, swimming pool, tennis courts, and separate buildings to house its math, science, humanities, arts, and athletic departments.

Crossroads High School shares none of these impressive statistics and attractive features. Crossroads is a continuation high school that draws its students from the four comprehensive high schools in the district, including Pinnacle. Students are sent to Crossroads when they have fallen behind on course credits such that they are no longer on normative time to graduate. Crossroads enrollment numbers typically fluctuate throughout the school year between 150 and 200 students as students are transferred in multiple waves. Students can return to their home institution once they have recovered enough credits, but this is rare: once students are placed in Crossroads, they typically remain there. For instance, during the 2013-2014 school year, only 17% of Crossroads students transferred back to their home school at the end of the school year.

The arrangement between Crossroads and the district's four mainstream high schools stipulates that students are transferred to Crossroads because of academic underperformance, not behavioral problems. Nevertheless, and though the school is nestled in the heart of an affluent suburb, the physical space has multiple features that are common of schools located in urban underclass neighborhoods plagued by violence and illicit activity: the grass beside the school is uncut and growing wildly; the school's façade is defined by a flat roof that is approximately the same height as the ceiling inside – a design that resembles a series of trailers; an imposing black metal fence runs around the school perimeter, and Crossroads is only high school in the district with a perimeter fence and gates that remain locked once the first bell sounds signaling the start of the school day; Crossroads's classroom buildings and main office comprise three sides of a rectangle (the fourth side is a metal fence) that ensure that students are always visible when they are outside of a classroom or the main office; three permanent spotlight towers line the longer of the two rows of classrooms.

Pinnacle and Crossroads also differ starkly in the ethnoracial composition of their student bodies, and on academic achievement metrics. As Table 1 shows, while Asians comprise 39% of Valley View’s population, they constitute 52.2% of the student body at Pinnacle, and only 9.5% at Crossroads. By stark contrast, Latinos and Blacks are overrepresented at Crossroads; they comprise 9.2% and 1.6% of Valley View’s population, 7.1% and 2.4% of Pinnacle’s student body, but 36.5% and 9.4% of the student body at Crossroads, respectively.

Table 1.
Racial Composition of Valley View, CA, Pinnacle and Crossroads High Schools

	Valley View, CA	Pinnacle High School	Crossroads High School
% Asian	39.1	52.2	9.5
% White	45.1	35.5	39.6
% Latino/Hispanic	9.2	7.1	36.5
% Black	1.6	1.8	9.4
% Other or Mixed	5.1	3.4	5.0

sources: U.S. Census 2014; Valley View Unified School district 2015

Furthermore, as shown in Table 2, Pinnacle and Crossroads diverge on measurements of disadvantage among their students. During the 2014–2015 school year, 15.2% of Pinnacle students were “socioeconomically disadvantaged,” and 5.0% were “students with disabilities.” At Crossroads, the same measures yield markedly different results: 51% socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 19.8% students with disabilities.

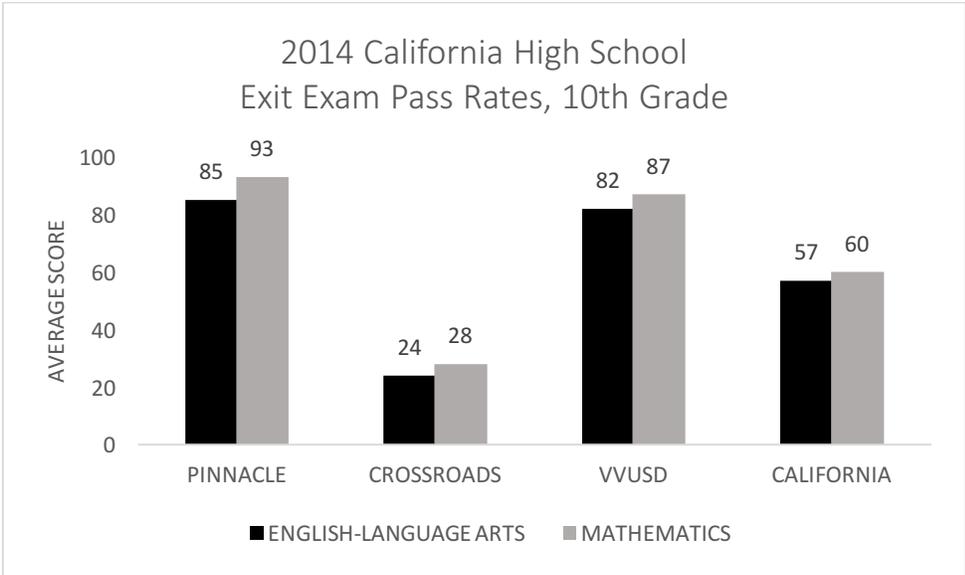
Table 2.
Percentages of Disadvantaged Students at Pinnacle High School and Crossroads High School

	Pinnacle High School	Crossroads High School
% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	15.2	51.0
% with Learning Disabilities	5.0	19.8

source: Valley View Unified School District 2015

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of students at Pinnacle and Crossroads who passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in English and Mathematics in 10th grade, compared to all students in the VVUSD and California. Especially noteworthy are the very low test scores of Crossroads’s students, and the fact that such a school is located within a school district where schools produce test scores that rise far above the state averages.

Figure 1.



source: Valley View Unified School District 2014

DATA AND METHODS

Research methods include participant observation and face-to-face, in-depth interviews. Over the course of 17 months during which schools were in session, I logged 99 hours of participant observation at “Crossroads High School” and 112 hours of participant observation at “Pinnacle High School.” These observations produced 197 pages of single spaced, typed field notes based on observations of multiple high school spaces and events, including classes in session, athletic events, luncheons, assemblies, conferences, department meetings, back-to-school nights, and

graduations. During each of these event types, I engaged in informal conversations with teachers, administrators, students, and parents in accordance with the “interviewing by comment” technique of qualitative data gathering (Snow, Zurcher, and Sjoberg 1982).

To obtain student interview subjects, I introduced myself to each class in which I was observing, and passed around a signup sheet for students to indicate their interest in being interviewed. I secured additional interviews with students, teachers, staff, and parents via snowball sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981), but I also practiced what Duneier (2011) refers to as “inconvenience sampling,” purposefully seeking out informants who might speak and act in ways that challenge my arguments. At Crossroads, I conducted formal interviews with 59 students, 9 teachers, 3 administrators, and 4 parents, and I participated in a focus group discussion with 14 parents. At Pinnacle, I conducted formal interviews with 17 students, 7 teachers, 4 administrators, and 6 parents, and I also conducted a focus group, roundtable discussion with 11 additional students. These interviews and conversations resulted in over 72 hours of taped interview audio, and over 1,000 pages of typed interview transcripts. I originally planned to conduct an equal number of interviews at each school, but I found greater heterogeneity of experiences among students at Crossroads, in large part due to the fact that all Crossroads students began their high school careers at Pinnacle or another local high school.

I coded interview transcripts and field notes using the “track changes” feature in Microsoft Word, highlighting portions of text and then typing codes in the margins. I then copied and pasted these portions of coded text into one or more of dozens of electronic folders on my laptop. I gave each folder the same name as the codes it contained, and organized all folders according to broader themes. Themes emerged inductively in a manner conforming with a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2001).

The issue of entrée and repeated access to field sites is a perennial one for ethnographers, and successful methods of entrée vary according to the type of social setting under study (Lofland et al. 2006). When the site or sites in question are quasi-private, or when potential informants are vulnerable or legally protected, the ethnographer's entrée and ongoing access cannot be guaranteed. This is certainly the case when gaining access to adolescents in schools, and gathering qualitative data in their classrooms and on school grounds.

For this study, I chose two schools that are barely one mile apart in the same affluent suburb, but worlds apart in terms of their facilities, curricula, racial composition of the student body, reputation in the community, and treatment of students. Differences between the two schools were also apparent during my process of gaining access to each as a field site. Initially, I encountered resistance in obtaining access to Pinnacle; after several weeks of back and forth over email, an assistant principal at Pinnacle cleared me, over email, to observe for "a few hours per week over the course of two or three weeks," a far cry from the extended community engagement necessary to conduct ethnographic research. He added in a later email that, "We try to be protective of our teachers and their teaching demands." However, this administrator also offered to reach out to teachers to gauge their interest in accommodating me in their classrooms, and several of those teachers subsequently contacted me and graciously invited me to spend as much time in their classrooms as was necessary for my project.

In contrast, administrators at Crossroads readily welcomed me to their school. In replying to my request to spend time hanging out on campus, the school psychologist remarked that, "Crossroads has a reputation as a school for bad kids, so it will be great for you to come and see all the great work that we are doing." She invited me on a guided tour of the school grounds. On that tour, I visited all 17 classrooms and met 12 full-time teachers.

The differences in posture toward researchers suggests that Pinnacle, an elite school, is concerned with managing its reputation as the flagship high school in the district, and wary of outsiders who might disrupt an experience for teachers and students that they view as positive, or shed light on unfavorable aspects of their school. As representatives of a stigmatized institution, Crossroads officials and teachers were eager to show me that their school was not nearly as bad as its reputation – a posture consistent with the exigencies stigmatized persons or groups (Avery 2014).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Structuring Educational Inequality

Socioeconomic inequality in the U.S. educational system reproduces socioeconomic inequality in society by affording fewer educational opportunities and resources to poor and working class students compared to their middle class and affluent counterparts (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Coleman et al. 1966; MacLeod 1995). Schools replicate the, “patterns of dominance and subordination in the production process, the distribution of ownership of productive resources, and the degree of social distance and solidarity among various fragments of the working population” (Bowles and Gintis 1976:126). In so doing, schools condition students for employment within a stratified economy; schools in middle-class neighborhoods prepare students for college and lucrative careers, while those in working class and poor neighborhoods are not as well equipped to do so (Lewis 2003; McDonough 1997).

Scholars have examined the specific policies and practices within schools that contribute to socioeconomic and racial disparities in academic performance. Academic structures within urban public schools often result in an uneven, racialized distribution of student treatment,

resources, and opportunities (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998; Carter 2005; Conchas 2001, 2006; Harris 2006; Howard 2010, 2013). For instance, curricular tracking policies in many urban public school systems disproportionately assign minority and low-income students to general or remedial classes and academic trajectories (Blanchett 2006; Darling-Hammond 2004; Valenzuela 1999), while White and Asian students in more advanced academic tracks benefit from environments with highly motivated classmates and highly qualified teachers (Lee and Zhou 2015; Oakes 1990). Moreover, lower tracks in high school are ill equipped to prepare students for post-secondary enrollment (Rosenbaum 1978).

Such course placements are not entirely meritocratic, and are instead influenced by social and structural factors that result in socioeconomic and racial stratification in schools (Lewis and Diamond 2015; Lucas 1999; Oakes 1982, 1985). Since tracking often reflects ethnoracial inequality, different academic tracks come to be associated with different ethnoracial groups in a way that mirrors common social and cultural stereotypes. This dynamic occurs even in racially integrated, richly resourced schools that represent a far cry from the overwhelming disadvantages that students of color experience in underfunded, urban public schools (Lewis and Diamond 2015).

In *chapter 2*, I extend this stream of research by addressing two research questions. First, how do elite, high performing public high schools contribute to the reproduction of ethnoracial and socioeconomic inequality in affluent communities? Second, how do educational institutions legitimize the reproduction of inequality? I unveil an unforgiving institutional culture and process of school segregation in an affluent, racially diverse suburb. Pinnacle High School supports an exacting *institutional success frame*, which advantages Asian American students, and jettisons low-performing students to Crossroads High School. The success frame provides a

rationale for institutional actors to legitimize and justify the segregation that they sponsor. Moreover, whereas tracking is a process of educational inequality that occurs *within* schools, this project details the consequences of an extreme form of tracking that happens *between* schools—a process of *academic segregation*. *Academic segregation* refers to school segregation based on academic standing, and it creates separate and unequal schools and school conditions, independent of neighborhood segregation. I discuss the theoretical implications of the ethnographic findings, and argue that an unyielding *institutional success frame* results in a process of *academic segregation*. *Academic segregation* reproduces ethnoracial and socioeconomic inequality, and the *institutional success frame* provides a rationale for institutional actors to legitimize and justify the segregation.

The Disproportionate Criminalization of Black and Latino Students

Prior studies of school segregation have focused on the ways in which neighborhood segregation leads to an uneven, racialized distribution of educational conditions, resources, and opportunities. For example, Shedd's (2015) study of Chicago schools and neighborhoods reveals that Black students face many barriers that their White counterparts across town do not, including surveillance practices by staff and law enforcement that lend a prison-like milieu to their school experiences. Law enforcement officers and surveillance cameras distract from an understanding of students' most basic needs (Kupchik 2010), and have long-term negative consequences for students (Kupchik 2016). In these educational environments, infrastructures based on control and punishment label Black and Latino youth as "dangerous" and "difficult" (Rios 2006). Perceived as threatening and troublesome, these students are disproportionately targeted with punitive policies and surveillance tactics at school (Noguera 2003a, 2003b; Rios 2011), and schools come to resemble and operate as institutions of coercive control (Foucault

1977). These educational conditions can have a deleterious effect on students' engagement and achievement; Black and Latino youth in urban public schools tend to disengage and display a "willful laziness" toward their education when they encounter criminalizing treatment and negative racial stereotypes at school (Lopez 2003).

In *Chapter 3*, I build on this thread of research by addressing two research questions. First, how do students at Crossroads experience their transfer and their time as students there? Second, how do Crossroads teachers perceive and approach their jobs as teachers at Crossroads, given that Crossroads is unique as the only continuation school in the district? Processes of surveillance and criminalization are common in urban public schools; in working-class, urban neighborhood schools, Black and Latino students are disproportionately confronted with prisonlike surveillance tactics and punitive policies designed to deter and confront behavioral problems. However, in affluent, suburban Valley View, I illuminate practices and conditions of student criminalization that have little to do with the threat of deviant behavior. Students in Valley View are criminalized and discredited for struggling academically.

Pinnacle High School sends its struggling students to neighboring Crossroads High School, a continuation school where students encounter restrictive metal fences and gates, panoptic surveillance by armed police, and a curriculum that disqualifies them from direct enrollment in a four-year college following graduation. I refer to these conditions as the *criminalization of mediocrity* – segregation, surveillance, and control of students as a consequence of their academic struggles. Furthermore, Black and Latino students are overrepresented at Crossroads, which indicates that the racialized processes and practices common to inner city schools also exist in affluent community contexts.

Academic segregation creates and maintains schools with a concentration of academically under-performing students, limited resources and course offerings, teachers who are often inexperienced or unable to find work at a comprehensive high school, and an environment in which students experience constant monitoring and surveillance. The conditions and opportunities that students must negotiate at Crossroads High School constitute a *criminalization of mediocrity*. Crossroads is a school in which students frequently feel discarded, devalued, discredited, and punished. Thus, although Crossroads was designed and created to function as a school where struggling students can get back on track, it often inadvertently works against its mission by inspiring “willful laziness” (Lopez 2003) in its students rather than academic engagement. I discuss the theoretical implications of my ethnographic observations in terms of the ways in which schools reproduce inequality by segregating, surveilling, and punishing students who do not meet the perceived Valley View norm of high achievement.

ETHNIC CAPITAL AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Not all students of color experience disproportionate segregation, criminalization, and the harshness of inequality in schools. In fact, Asian-Americans, the fastest growing group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2012), outpace all other racial groups on a variety of primary, secondary, and post-secondary school achievement metrics. For example, as an aggregate racial group, Asian students achieve the highest math and science scores, enroll in the greatest number of advanced placement and international baccalaureate courses, have the highest post-secondary graduation rates, and lowest rates of absenteeism and dropout at all grade levels (National Center for Education Statistics 2016). At Ivy League universities like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, more than one-fifth of the entering freshman class is Asian American. At the most elite public universities like UC Berkeley and UCLA, Asian Americans constitute more than 40 percent of

the student body. As a result, Asians have been portrayed as a “model minority” group in popular literature (Chua and Rubinfeld 2015) and media (Kristof 2015) – a group that succeeds not because they are inherently more intelligent, but because they adhere to a culture and set of values that produce superior results.

For Asian-Americans, however, the “model minority” stereotype is a relatively recent phenomenon (Kao 1995). Asians were once viewed as heathen, peculiar, unintelligent, and certainly unassimilable. In 19th-century California, White settlers compared the Chinese to the “uncivilized” Native Americans and “irresponsible,” “lazy” Blacks (Almaguer 1994). In fact, the Chinese were viewed so unfavorably that, in 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act to put a stop to Chinese immigration.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was a watershed moment for modern American immigration; it opened America’s doors to mass immigration from Latin America and Asia, quickly rendering the Black-White racial binary a phenomenon of the past in many regions (Gold 2004). Post-1965 immigration patterns have complicated the White/non-White racial framework as various newcomers experience various assimilation trajectories (Portes and Zhou 1993). The overall patterns evince a considerably diminished social distance between Whites and other groups including Asians, many of whom have assumed an “honorary White” status within America’s contemporary racial landscape (Bonilla-Silva 2004). For example, Asians experience less racial residential segregation from Whites than do Hispanics, and far less than do Blacks (Charles 2003; Iceland 2009). This is significant because we know the negative effects that racial segregation has on jobs, education, and family structure (Massey and Denton 1993). For Asians, low levels of residential segregation from Whites means increased opportunity for social interaction, and research on interracial dating shows that racial boundaries are steadily

fading between Asians and Whites (Lee and Bean 2010), which is a robust indication of Asian assimilation.

These changes are also occurring in the domain of education, where notions of intelligence have also witnessed a shift in terms of race and ethnicity. For the lion's share of the 20th-century, Whites and "whiteness" were associated with academic engagement and achievement in America (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Ogbu 2004). East-Asian immigrants are a hyper-selected group, meaning that the average immigrant has higher levels of education and socioeconomic status than the average citizen in their country of origin and the average citizen in the United States (Lee and Zhou 2015). This hyper-selectivity laid the foundation for Asian Americans to displace Whites as the model group for academic achievement (Jiménez and Horowitz 2013).

The model minority stereotype has likely contributed to Asian academic success in America; Asians are often viewed as naturally intelligent and thus tracked into high-level courses and presented with advantageous educational opportunities, a phenomenon termed "stereotype promise" (Lee 2014). Moreover, Asian immigrants of all socioeconomic backgrounds reap the benefits of specific Asian ethnic resources that assist them in education and in labor and housing markets (Lee and Zhou 2014; Zhou and Kim 2006). In short, the prevailing sentiment of Asians in America has undergone a profound shift from "unassimilable to exceptional" (Lee 2013).

Despite the community resources that give some immigrant families a solid start in America, the relationship between immigrant families and schools is often challenging. The expectations that most schools have for parental involvement often disadvantage the children of immigrants, whose parents are unfamiliar with educational practices in the receiving society and do not know how to become involved, or do not have the time to get involved as they adapt to

life and language in a new country (Alba et al. 2011). This is noteworthy since parental involvement can affect children's academic engagement and achievement, with greater parental participation associated with better outcomes for students (Epstein 2001).

In *Chapter 4*, I extend research on immigrant assimilation and ethnic capital by addressing the research question: What are the features of Korean and Chinese parental involvement in the Valley View Unified School district, and what are the consequences of this parental participation? Not long ago Valley View was a mostly White suburb known for its balmy weather and terrific public schools. However, in recent decades, the city's ethnoracial landscape has changed considerably as a result of contemporary immigration. Today, Valley View is also recognized as a destination city for immigrants, and Asian population growth in Valley View has significantly outpaced that of other groups (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Between 2000 and 2010, the Asian population grew from 43,042 to 83,176 individuals – an increase of over 93%. The overall share of Asians in Valley View also increased markedly during this time, from 29% in 2000 to nearly 40% in 2010. In 2010, Chinese- and Korean-Americans comprised the majority of Valley View's Asian population, at 22% and 32%, respectively, and over 20% of the total population combined. Meanwhile, though the overall number of Whites also increased during this period, the percentage of Whites fell from 61% to 50% amid a wave of new non-White residents. Local newspapers published articles about how Asians have become the “dominant group” in Valley View, and what the surge of Asian residents “means for the city” going forward.

I illuminate specific processes by which Korean and Chinese immigrant parents marshal ethnic resources to frame their culture and children as distinct and exceptional, and to support the academic opportunities and achievement of their students. In Valley View, East Asian

immigrants facilitate a process of *two-sided assimilation*: rather than strictly assimilating to the mainstream school culture, Chinese and South Korean immigrant families dictate the nature of assimilation and cultural exchange by pooling their resources into ethnically segregated organizations, and formally instructing local teachers and officials on the best methods for educating their students. The separate and exclusive Korean and Chinese parent organizations work with the school to raise money, donate supplies and their own money to the school, and host special events for faculty and staff. These parent organizations provide strong co-ethnic networks for students and parents, networks that facilitate educational opportunities both at the school and in the community. Thus, Asian families enhance the reputation of their ethnic group and education opportunities of their students in part by drawing on ethnic resources in collaboration with Pinnacle High School. By stark contrast, their Black and Latino classmates face disproportionate levels of marginalization, segregation, and criminalization.

ADDRESSING PROBLEMS OF SCHOOL SEGREGATION, STUDENT CRIMINALIZATION, AND INEQUALITIES IN ETHNIC CAPITAL

In *Chapter 5*, I conclude by summarizing the central findings, providing policy prescriptions based on the empirical data, and discussing limitations of my research as well as suggestions future directions. Drawing on data from the previous three chapters, as well as data specific to addressing recurring inequalities, I privilege the experiences and perceptions of students, parents, and teachers to make concrete policy recommendations toward a more equitable public education system within the Valley View Unified School District.

I contend that the racialization of achievement as an “Asian thing” reinforces ethnoracial stratification and inequality in schools. Tying academic success with a certain ethnic or racial group perpetuates a narrative that the groups who succeed do so because they are culturally

predisposed, while those that struggle do so because of a cultural deficit and a lack of importance placed on education. Furthermore, these views reify stereotypes about which students are worthy of educational resources, and which are good candidates for a transfer to Crossroads. I argue that these stereotypes manifest in implicit and explicit biases held by teachers and administrators, and that ethnic and racial differences in parental participation reflect the structural disadvantages that some groups face, rather than cultural proclivities.

I engage with theories and debates about educational inequality (tracking and school segregation), the criminalization of youth in schools, and the ways in which immigrants' ethnic resources and cultural frames of success affect assimilation processes and trajectories. I provide an in-depth discussion of the ways in which institutions and institutional systems structure opportunities for students in ways that inadvertently reproduce inequality, and how the ethnic resources of hyper-selected immigrant groups have been institutionalized in ways that provide advantages for their children in schools.

Public schools are supposed to be equalizing forces – places where students, no matter their background, can receive an education that prepares them for a bright future, and receive treatment that acknowledges their value to the future of society. However, as we will see in the following chapters, schools reproduce existing social stratification, and this social reproduction occurs in utopian, suburban communities that share little in common with the urban, underclass locales traditionally associated with educational inequality.

CHAPTER 2

ACADEMIC SEGREGATION AND THE INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS FRAME

While researchers have linked the continued segregation of schools to the racial and class segregation of neighborhoods, school segregation also exists within neighborhoods. The central questions I address in this chapter are: do elite, high performing public high schools contribute to the reproduction of ethnoracial and socioeconomic inequality in affluent communities? If so, how do these institutions legitimize the reproduction of inequality? In this chapter, I unveil an unforgiving institutional culture and process of school segregation in affluent, suburban Valley View. My findings reveal a rigid and unforgiving *institutional success frame* of academic excellence at Pinnacle that marginalizes students who fail to meet it. Pinnacle supports this *institutional success frame* through a process of *academic segregation*, which jettisons low-performing students to Crossroads, a neighboring continuation school. Crossroads, a physically separate, unequal, and punitive high school, enrolls a student body that is disproportionately Black and Latino. Thus, *academic segregation* reproduces ethnoracial inequality within the Valley View Unified School District. Moreover, institutional actors at Pinnacle references the *institutional success frame* to legitimize this segregation and justify the inequality that they perpetuate.

I draw from Goffman's (1974:21) concept of "frame" to delineate a "schemata of interpretation" that allows people to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" various episodes and circumstances in their lives and the world around them. Frames enable individuals to make

sense of their experiences and, in so doing, frames inspire both individual and collective action (Snow et al. 1986). I then build on Lee and Zhou's (2015) "success frame," which denotes the demanding and exacting perceptions of achievement that East-Asian immigrant parents often hold for their children in American schools and the labor market. By *institutional success frame*, I refer to a collective interpretation of academic achievement cultivated by institutional actors, such as school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. At Pinnacle High School, the institutional success frame holds that students enroll in a challenging series of "honors" and "advanced placement" (AP) classes, achieve tops marks on AP exams, strive to attain better than a 4.0 grade point average, and gain admission to a prestigious four-year university. Academic excellence is the expectation.

Pinnacle students who fall below these lofty standards are at risk of *academic segregation*. Whereas tracking is a process of curriculum segregation and inequality that occurs within schools, and residential segregation results in disparate opportunities between schools in different neighborhoods, *academic segregation* is an extreme form of tracking that takes place between schools within the same neighborhood. It creates and maintains schools with a concentration of academically under-performing students, limited resources, truncated course offerings that do not allow for admission into a four-year university, and an environment in which students experience constant monitoring and surveillance by staff members and a police officer. Consequently, academic segregation reproduces ethnoracial and socioeconomic inequality by disproportionately shepherding Black, Latino, and working class students into an academically subpar continuation school, with little chance to return to the neighboring comprehensive high school.

SCHOOLS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF INEQUALITY

Research in the sociology of education has yielded important insights on the relationship between educational inequality and inequality in broader society. Education systems reproduce socioeconomic inequality in the broader society by affording fewer educational opportunities and resources to poor and working class students than to their middle-class peers (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Coleman et al. 1966; MacLeod 1995; McDonough 1997). In so doing, public schools condition students for employment within a stratified economy.

Tracking practices disproportionately assign minority and low-income students to general or remedial education classes (Blanchett 2006; Darling-Hammond 2004; Valenzuela 1999), while White and Asian students in more advanced academic tracks benefit from environments with highly motivated classmates and highly qualified teachers (Carbonaro and Gamoran 2002; Lee and Zhou 2015; Oakes 1990). Track placement is critically important for a given high school student's academic trajectory and future; lower tracks in high school are ill equipped to prepare students for post-secondary enrollment (Rosenbaum 1978, 1980), and for high school English learners, academic track placement is actually a stronger predictor of academic achievement than English proficiency (Callahan 2005). Since tracking often reflects ethnoracial inequality, different academic tracks come to be associated with different ethnoracial groups in a way that mirrors common social and cultural stereotypes (Lewis and Diamond 2015).

Prior studies of school segregation have focused on the ways in which neighborhood segregation leads to an uneven, racialized distribution of educational resources and opportunities. For example, Shedd's (2015) study of Chicago neighborhoods and schools reveals that Black students face many barriers that their White counterparts across town do not. But these features of educational inequality are not limited to highly segregated urban areas like Chicago. In this

chapter I reveal similar dynamics of school segregation and resource inequality affluent suburb and among a local population that reflects contemporary immigration patterns. *Academic segregation* creates separate and unequal schools and school conditions, and does so independently of the forces of residential segregation that so often lead to disparities in school resources and quality.

A RIGID INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS FRAME AND A PROCESS OF ACADEMIC SEGREGATION

The Institutional Success Frame

An institutional success frame is a collective interpretation of what it means to be successful as a member of that institution. At Pinnacle, the school's success frame and academic prowess are a permanent part of the physical architecture. A large brick arch, roughly the width of a single-car garage and the height of a large school bus, frames the front entrance to the main office.

"PINNACLE HIGH SCHOOL" appears across the top of the arch in large metal letters affixed to the bricks. Two phrases are positioned at eye-level on either side of the arch. The phrase on the left side reads, "California Distinguished School", and the phrase on the right reads, "National Exemplary School". These phrases, like the school's name above them, are permanently attached to the brick archway, and they are annual distinctions. Similar awards are on display at other high schools in the county, typically as pennants or banners indicating the specific year or years in which the honor was bestowed. But Pinnacle has effectively tattooed these distinctions to its entranceway, and the permanence of the phrases suggests that the school is deeply proud of its stellar academic reputation.

Pinnacle's institutional success frame is grounded in parental definitions and expectations of academic achievement. For example, Ryan, a 16-year-old Chinese-American junior enrolled

in AP biology, AP chemistry, AP U.S. history, and AP Chinese told me that his parents constantly pressured him to achieve in school so that he could attain a prestigious profession:

My dad is a medical doctor and my mom is a chemist. So, I've always been taught that to be a successful adult you have to be a doctor or a scientist; you have to wear a white coat; you have to be this person.

Ryan also shed light on the ways in which parents contribute to a prevalence of academic competition among students at Pinnacle. Parents push students to excel by comparing them to their other high-achieving classmates:

Parents talk to each other, and they know who the smartest kids are and what grades they get. I remember I got a 96[%] on my honors chemistry final last year. I told my mom, but she already knew about a girl who had gotten a perfect score, so she told me to work harder and do better.

Ryan's experiences were widely shared. In fact, all Pinnacle students, teachers, administrators, and parents that I interviewed believed that parents influenced the institutional success frame by driving the work ethic and achievements of students.

Pinnacle also plays an important role because the institutional success frame is reinforced within classrooms. For instance, Mr. Coleman, a freshman and AP biology teacher, teaches in a room with dozens of college pennants lining the upper walls. These pennants represent a selection of the colleges and universities that Mr. Coleman's former students chose to attend. A brief scan of pennants positioned along the back wall reads like a published list of top-ranked post-secondary schools: Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, M.I.T., Cal Tech, UCLA, USC, UC Irvine, UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, Duke, Brown, Dartmouth, NYU, Georgia Tech, Vanderbilt, Michigan, Northwestern. For Mr. Coleman, the prestigious post-secondary enrollment of his former students is great source of "personal pride," and these pennants serve as badges of pedagogical honor. The display is also symbolic of the institutional success frame,

and a tacit reminder to current Pinnacle students of the level of success that is expected of them as members of the school community.

The frame is further reinforced by pedagogical practices that call out students who are struggling and privilege the highest achievers. After passing back graded exams, Ms. McKinson, who teaches freshman algebra, always begins class by opening a spreadsheet on her computer that lists each student's ID number and his or her cumulative grade in the class. She displays the spreadsheet on an overhead projector and reads down the list, referring to various students by their ID numbers and commenting on their grades. "22915, you *just* made the cutoff for an A." "22513, you *just* made the cutoff for a B, but if you slip up you might get a C." She now skips down the list to the small handful of students who are nearly failing. "22398, do you want to take algebra again next year?" "22887, you are in the wrong class." Ms. McKinson now focuses on three failing students. "These three kids will not survive," she announces. Students who struggle are flatly told that they don't belong, and they risk suffering embarrassing consequences for their struggles.

Teachers also support the success frame by routinely affording special classroom privileges to the highest achieving students. For example, Ms. Johnson, a middle-aged, White U.S. history teacher who was born and raised in Valley View, arranged a Skype video conference question and answer session between her sophomore students and a small group of cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point. She informs the class that the students with the five highest cumulative grades in the class will each get to ask one question, and she announces their names in rank order. The student ranked fifth declines, so the student ranked sixth takes her place. Taken together, these classroom examples show how the institutional success frame affects, and is supported by, pedagogical strategies. Students are

constantly and publicly compared to others who are making better grades, which contributes to a consensus opinion among students, teachers, and parents that the Pinnacle environment is competitive and “cutthroat.”

The frame also informs students’ study habits and the elective classes that they choose to take. Mehdi, the son of Iranian immigrants, took nothing but honors classes during freshman year, and then added AP U.S. history to a full schedule of honors classes during sophomore year. Now a junior, Mehdi sought to lighten his course load because the stress of maintaining a 4.0 grade point average in all honors and AP classes was wearing him down. He was exhausted from staying up well past midnight every night to study. Mehdi described his 11th-grade course load as an admission of defeat within the Pinnacle success frame:

This year, I just gave up. I have five classes and my only AP classes are AP biology and AP chemistry. It’s kinda funny how that’s not a big load of courses here [at Pinnacle], because at other schools that’s a huge load. I’m taking AP biology and AP chemistry together! My friends at other schools call me crazy for it, but that’s normal here.

Thus, the institutional success frame dictates that a course schedule including two infamously challenging AP science classes can signal a student who “gave up” and is taking an easier path through high school.

The Pinnacle success frame also has important consequences for students who are not enrolled in the most challenging courses, making top grades, and seeking admission to a highly prestigious university. Students who do not measure up feel like failures and outliers within an institution that promotes such an exacting definition of successfulness. Arata, a senior whose parents emigrated to Valley View from Japan two years before he was born, took four honors level classes during his freshman year. He studied hard, but he “struggled” and “barely got a 3.0 GPA” in those classes, which made him feel “inadequate and left back, left alone because all my

friends and everyone around me was succeeding.” As a result, he took a combined total of three honors and AP classes during his sophomore, junior, and senior years. Arata took the SAT exam “six times!” before he and his parents were satisfied with his score, and he envied his classmates and friends who took the exam only once, scored higher than he did, and bragged that the test was easy. Several of those friends and classmates gained admission to one or more Ivy League universities but Arata did not, which made him question his intelligence:

I wish I could be smart, but I’m just not. Maybe I could be smart at another high school, but at Pinnacle I’m probably below average. It sucks, but those other kids deserve it more than me.

Like most students at Pinnacle, Mehdi and Arata lean on the institutional success frame to contextualize and explain their academic struggles and shortcomings.

Each year in late April, Pinnacle holds a college sweatshirt day where graduating students come to school wearing a sweatshirt from their college of choice. Sweatshirts from Ivy League and University of California schools are abundant on this day, although the University of Southern California, a prestigious local private university, is also a popular target and choice. For Pinnacle students who do not fit the profile of an outstanding student who chooses from multiple top-ranked colleges, the sweatshirt day experience can be alienating. While waiting in the lunch line on a sunny day in early June, Maryann, a senior with long, naturally blond hair, commented:

I’m going to [the local community college] next year, so I didn’t wear a sweatshirt [on college sweatshirt day]. It’s embarrassing if you’re not going to a fancy school. People look at you like, “What happened?”

At Pinnacle, academic exceptionalism is normalized, and to be average is to fall short of the institutional success frame of achievement that dictates the academic compass and trajectory of so many students. Students who fall short often struggle to fit in, and Maryann’s choice to

forego participation in the sweatshirt ritual was her way of coping as a student who did not meet the demanding standards of the institutional success frame.

The Racialization of Achievement

At Pinnacle High School, different racial groups are associated with specific traits and tendencies. The “model minority” stereotype of Asian American achievement holds that Asian students outperform other racial groups because their inherent cultural traits predispose them to academic excellence (Kao 1995). This stereotype is widely endorsed by Pinnacle students, faculty, and parents of all races. Asian students account for more than fifty percent of the student body at Pinnacle High School, and they are frequently the highest achievers in terms of grades and test scores. Asian students are also overrepresented in honors and AP classes; they routinely represent over eighty-percent of the students in these classes regardless of subject. The majority are 1.5-, and second-generation immigrants from South Korea and China.⁴ According to Mr. Holt, an assistant principal at Pinnacle for nearly a decade, the Korean and Chinese students were to thank for the school’s competitive national academic ranking, and for contributing to the studious classroom culture at Pinnacle:

Interviewer: What kind of impact do the Korean and Chinese students have on the school?

Mr. Holt: They are what keeps our school rank high. They improve our scores. Those are the kids that you want in your class. If you are a teacher that wants order and you don't want to have to deal with problems, and you want the kids that come in and know their stuff, you want the Chinese and Korean kids. They will study probably hours and hours without ever raising a finger saying anything.

Black students at Pinnacle are perceived in a very different light, and Mr. Holt acknowledged that the school community is not as welcoming and supportive of its Black student population as it should be:

We have an issue we have got to address with our Black students. There is a perception out there that I have heard from teachers and kids that we disproportionately discipline Black students, like we give them more suspension days than other students. It's true that a high percentage of them get in trouble, and I think this really contributes to our Black students feeling like they are a persecuted group.

Indeed, Black students at Pinnacle felt as though they were unfairly targeted for discipline, often for infractions that they deemed as trivial, arbitrary, or nonexistent. Moreover, and consistent with that sentiment, Black students routinely expressed a belief that the school catered to the highest achieving students and hastily pressured struggling students to leave for Crossroads. Mariah, a 16-year-old sophomore who recently moved to Valley View from a neighboring city, expressed views that are representative of others in the Black student community:

Mariah: I hate it here [at Pinnacle]. Everyone thinks it's a great school, but they don't care about anyone. All they do is all for looks. The teachers don't care about you. They just care about the students that started off good and are the top students. You could be all the way behind and they don't try to catch you up; you're just left back there. I mean, when I first came here it was really hard for me, and none of my teachers cared.

Interviewer: What do they care about?

Mariah: They only care about the students who are already doing well. And with me, when I was doing bad, they were trying to find a way to get me out of the school instead of helping me.

Interviewer: How so?

Mariah: They were like, 'Ok, well, you can go to Crossroads.' From what I heard, Crossroads wasn't a good school, so I really didn't want to go there. So I felt like, instead of trying to send me to Crossroads, they should just help me get back up to speed and stay here at Pinnacle. But they don't care; they don't want to help.

This comparative case of Asian and Black students highlights a consequential way in which Pinnacle, an elite and academically prestigious school, contributes to the reproduction of ethnoracial inequality. The Asian and Black student populations represent extremes in

Pinnacle’s ethnoracial landscape, with Asians regarded as academically gifted and obedient, and Black students perceived as potential troublemakers who undermine the success frame. These perceptions are reflected in the excessive discipline and marginalization of Black students at Pinnacle, and the consequences of *academic segregation*, which shepherds a disproportionately high number of Black students to Crossroads.

Dumping Students to Crossroads: Academic Segregation in Motion

Continuation schools, also commonly referred to as “alternative schools,” are fixtures in public school districts across the country. Continuation schools serve a purportedly benevolent purpose – to provide a smaller, more intimate, and less rigorous setting for students who are struggling academically at their comprehensive high school. Crossroads, established in 1974, is described on the VVUSD website as “the result of the efforts of a group of students, parents, teachers and administrators who challenged the assumption that the comprehensive high school is the appropriate learning environment for all students.” Crossroads is further portrayed as a “workable and proven choice to Valley View’s traditional high schools.” However, the district also states that alternative schools work best when “the student commits and determines to work hard,” and that Crossroads’s students are encouraged to “take an honest look at themselves, develop a positive attitude, and do the right thing every day.” These statements allude to additional, non-academic challenges at Crossroads regarding student commitment and behavior, challenges that schools like Pinnacle can pass off to Crossroads rather than deal with themselves.

At Crossroads High School, the common perception among teachers is that the school plays a direct role in helping comprehensive high schools like Pinnacle manage academic rankings and reputations by serving as a “dumping ground” for students whom the other high

schools do not want to deal with. Mr. Clark is a math teacher at Crossroads in his late-twenties, and his views are representative:

Interviewer: What role do you think Crossroads plays in the district?

Mr. Clark: I think that, for the district and the comprehensive high schools like Pinnacle, Crossroads is about getting rid of the students that don't fit in at their school. My feeling is that we are [Crossroads is] just this dumping ground for the other high schools. A lot of these kids here, for whatever reason, just aren't fitting in at the comprehensive schools, and the big high schools don't have as much time for the struggling students.

Mr. Clark's sentiments are common among teachers and faculty at Crossroads; nearly all felt as though the school's stated purpose of credit recovery was undermined by the way in which the school was used by the neighboring comprehensive high schools as a place to jettison low-achievers.

Pinnacle has a "threshold of credit deficiency" that a given student must reach before they are deemed a candidate for transfer to Crossroads. However, according to several Pinnacle administrators, it is not uncommon for counselors and assistant principals to push for the transfer of a student who has not yet reached that threshold. For example, Mr. Bradley, the principal at Pinnacle, lamented a recent change in leadership and philosophy at Crossroads regarding the acceptance of transfer students from Pinnacle:

There were a couple instances recently where we saw a kid that maybe wasn't totally at that threshold, but we knew that his grades had been slipping. Last year we had a handful of sophomores that we wanted to send because we wanted to kind of do it sooner rather than later, and Crossroads said 'no.' Our assistant principals and counselors went back and forth on the issue with their colleagues at Crossroads, but ultimately the kids had to stay here until they met that threshold.

Crossroads administrators felt tension with their counterparts at schools like Pinnacle, often arguing over whether a student was a good candidate to be transferred. In separate conversations, the Crossroads principal and assistant principal told me that, among the four

comprehensive high schools in the district, Pinnacle was particularly eager to push for the transfer of “nearly credit deficient” and “barely credit deficient” students.

Hassan’s experience of transfer from Pinnacle to Crossroads is representative. A tall, slender 16-year-old junior at Crossroads, Hassan began his high school career in San Diego, but enrolled at Pinnacle when his family moved to Valley View midway through his freshman year. He had been a good student in San Diego – “As and Bs” – but he struggled with the move to a new city, his single mother’s new work schedule, and the academic culture at Pinnacle, which he found to be extremely fast-paced and competitive, especially compared to his old “ghetto” high school in San Diego. Hassan, the son of Somali immigrants, did well in his classes until midway through spring semester, when the pressure and workload eventually overwhelmed him. He “failed a couple of classes,” and once he posted those failing grades, counselors at Pinnacle pressed him to transfer to Crossroads in part, he felt, to protect the school’s reputation:

Hassan: I think Pinnacle cares a lot about its reputation, I heard stories from my friends who come from other schools, and they say that when they’re having that meeting about coming to Crossroads, they [the other schools] are more lenient, and you have more of a choice. But at Pinnacle, if they see you are slipping up even a little bit, they want you to go to Crossroads.

Interviewer: They want you to go to Crossroads if your grades slip too much?

Hassan: Yeah. They just care about their reputation so much. They don't want their reputation to be ruined.

Hassan’s views are shared by Pinnacle students who are not enrolled in the most difficult classes and making top grades, and therefore do not meet the exacting tenets of the institutional success frame. These students are marginalized, particularly when they face institutional pressure to transfer to Crossroads.

Leveraging the Institutional Success Frame to Justify Segregated Schools

At Pinnacle, when assistant principals and counselors determine that a given student is a good candidate for Crossroads, they meet with the student and family to communicate their position. The argument put forth by Pinnacle faculty and staff typically centers on the belief that the academic rigor of Pinnacle is not a good environment for every student, and, should the student in question remain at Pinnacle, the student will continue to struggle and likely fail to graduate. Crossroads is presented as an easier alternative, where no homework is assigned, class sizes are noticeably smaller, and the school day is much shorter. Students are also often told that they can return to Pinnacle and graduate with their friends as long as they maintain good attendance and recover the requisite amount of credits at Crossroads. The student and family are then given a choice to remain at Pinnacle or transfer to Crossroads.

For “credit deficient” students, and although transfer to Crossroads is purportedly voluntary, it is common practice for Pinnacle administrators to apply considerable pressure on a student and his or her parents when the family resists a transfer. Mr. Holt described this process as a joint effort between assistant principals and counselors to persuade the family to leave Pinnacle:

I’ll get involved if the parents need the hard sell, like if the parents are blocking the move [to Crossroads] or saying no. For example, I dealt with parents last year who went over to Crossroads to take a look, and they came back here and they were like, ‘It’s got fences around it and it looks like a prison. I don’t want my kid there.’ The counselors then will call us [an assistant principal] in to try to sell it to the parents.

Moreover, in such cases of parent or student resistance it is customary for assistant principals and counselors to argue that a diploma from Crossroads is the same as a diploma from Pinnacle. The reality is that although both diplomas are high school degrees administered by the VVUSD, Crossroads’s limited curriculum means that graduates’ post-secondary options are limited to

community college or trade school. Throughout this transfer decision process, Pinnacle counselors and administrators make their position clear by using the success frame to legitimize and justify their plan to transfer the student.

Once the decision is made to leave for Crossroads, that decision is final; when a student enrolls at Crossroads they must remain there until they recover all of their credits and are no longer credit deficient, at which point they can stay and graduate from Crossroads, or transfer back to Pinnacle. During a meeting of fourteen Crossroads parents and four members of the local public school accreditation commission, the parents voiced unanimous frustration with the relationship between Crossroads and the comprehensive high schools because they perceived the transfer of a student to Crossroads as a way for high schools like Pinnacle to “protect their elite status” while “failing to support the needs of all students.” Several felt that Crossroads was a school for students who have been academically “outcasted” – the students that schools like Pinnacle “do not want to help directly” because helping struggling students would be more difficult than simply catering to the students who are academically successful.

Supporting the Institutional Success Frame Through Academic Segregation and Selective Utilization of Student Talent

While at Pinnacle, I often attended Ms. Mitchell’s U.S. history class, a required course for sophomores. Ms. Mitchell’s custom was to offer me a seat behind her desk as she lectured, and to provide me a copy of the seating chart. One day I noticed that Andre, a Black male sophomore and star athlete at Pinnacle, had been crossed off of the seating chart. I asked her why. “He got transferred to Crossroads for credit recovery,” she said.

In Ms. Mitchell’s class, Andre’s assigned seat was in the back of the room and he often complained during class about not being able to read the lecture slides. But his complaints were

not taken seriously; during one class period, Ms. Mitchell asked Andre why he wasn't taking notes. "Because I'm blind," replied Andre. His classmates chuckled, Ms. Mitchell frowned and shook her head, and the lecture continued. Andre had a low grade-point-average, which prompted his transfer to Crossroads. Once at Crossroads, one of his new teachers, Ms. Jones, immediately noticed that he had trouble seeing the board in class. Ms. Jones spoke with one of the school counselors who then scanned Andre's special education file and saw that he was listed as having poor eyesight and the need to wear reading glasses during class. The counselor immediately sent an email to all Crossroads teachers to inform them of Andre's reliance on his glasses. Ms. Jones gave him daily reminders to bring his glasses to school and wear them during class. She called his mother to remind her to send Andre to school with his glasses.

After teachers addressed his poor sight, Andre's grade point average tripled from a 0.8 to a 2.4 in only four weeks. The credits that he earned as a result of this improvement made him eligible to play football and basketball for Pinnacle (Crossroads does not have sports teams), but did not make him eligible to return to Pinnacle as a student. He was allowed on the court and the field, but remained banned from all classrooms. By allowing Andre to play sports but not attend class, Pinnacle suggests that Andre is valuable as an athlete, but somehow detrimental as a student. His athletic prowess is coveted and celebrated while his academic struggles are a liability, addressed by way of a criminalizing transfer to Crossroads. The school ensures that the grades and test scores of student-athletes like Andre will not be associated with the school, while enhancing its mediocre athletic reputation by allowing such students to represent the school in various sports. Pinnacle selectively utilizes Andre's athletic talent while dissolving the responsibility of developing him as a student.

High achieving students are also utilized. Pinnacle teachers marshal students' academic talents as a pedagogical resource. For example, Ms. Potter, who teaches AP chemistry and basketball, was quick to express her appreciation for Pinnacle students' ability to assist her:

During my office hours, if there are several students there and maybe they have different questions, I can call over another student like, 'Hey, come help them with this.' I can't always anticipate what they'll have trouble with, but their classmates get it. It makes my job so much easier.

During my ethnographic observations at Pinnacle, I often witnessed this type of peer tutoring in the "advanced placement," "honors," "college preparatory," and "sheltered" (English language learner) academic tracks, and it constitutes a meaningful source of support for teachers and students alike.

Pinnacle is reputed as one of the most prestigious and highly ranked public high schools in the nation, and they actively construct and maintain their academic reputation in part by selectively keeping and cultivating some students, farming out others to Crossroads, and drawing on the specific strengths of students to bolster their academic and athletic profiles. Moreover, Pinnacle teachers can rely on pedagogical support from their most accomplished students, who serve as de facto teaching assistants. Crossroads teachers do not have this luxury with their students; instead, they are responsible for teaching the students that Pinnacle discards.

Separate and Unequal Schooling Within an Affluent Suburb

Just as residential segregation creates separate and unequal living environments and access to community resources, academic segregation creates separate and unequal teaching and learning environments and access to education resources and opportunities. For example, Crossroads's graduates are unable to enroll in a four-year university, such as a University of California or California State University school, because Crossroads does not offer all of the required courses

that would make them eligible. This limits students' post-secondary school options to community college or trade school, even for students who demonstrate exemplary attendance, behavior, and academic performance.

Crossroads was not established as a disciplinary school. Policy explicitly dictates that students are to be sent to Crossroads because they are credit deficient, not because of behavioral problems. However, classroom disruptions are a common component of the academic culture at Crossroads, and teachers must constantly manage their classrooms and keep students on task. For example, Ms. Turner, a white, middle-aged English teacher in her third year at Crossroads, spends most of her teaching time managing the class, telling a small group of students to quiet down, asking a girl to, "please put your phone away," and frequently deriding the entire class for their lack of maturity and focus. Tobias, a short, slender boy of West African and Portuguese descent and frequent disruptor in all of his classes, questions Ms. Turner's choice of profession: "I think you should work at a library, where nobody talks," he suggests.

These frequent disruptions and provocations undermine a teacher's authority and shift the focus from teaching to keeping and restoring order. Thus, although the majority of students in each class are quiet and respectful of the teacher, nearly every class has a handful of students who lack academic focus and are defiant. Such students are a source of irritation for Crossroads students who are motivated to improve. During a discussion at one of the outdoor picnic tables, a group of 12th-grade girls expresses their displeasure with the in-class antics of some of their classmates:

Stacy: I don't like how kids talk shit to their teachers here. It's so disrespectful.

Faith: Did you hear that girl today in English?! She was just arguing and talking so much shit. That's why I can't be a teacher at a school like this, because if I'm a teacher, and a kid talked to me like that, I would get fired on my first day. And it's hard to get work done when kids talk shit all during class.

In stark contrast, Pinnacle High School students, rather than inciting defiant behavior in their classmates, typically censor disruptive classroom behavior and demonstrate a level of collective focus and attention that supports teaching and learning. Ms. Potter's AP chemistry class is a case in point. At the start of her class on a typical day, students who have turned in their homework are socializing quietly at their desks. Two Asian boys chat about their college choices, excited that they will be attending UC Berkeley and UCLA. The boys smile and high-five each other. Ms. Potter begins passing back graded homework assignments, and many students spin around in their seats to compare scores with their classmates.

"Ok, let's get started!" says Ms. Potter in a commanding, yet calm voice. The class instantaneously falls completely silent, as if a switch were flipped. Students retrieve a pen or pencil from their backpack, open their notebooks, and set their eyes on Ms. Potter and the chalkboard on which she writes. She does not need to spend any time quieting the classroom before beginning the lesson, or maintaining her students' focus during the lesson, luxuries that allow her and her colleagues at Pinnacle to spend nearly all of their time and energy in class on teaching. Indeed, Pinnacle students who pay close attention during class sometimes still struggle with certain concepts and need extra instruction, but such instances further underscore the benefit students who assist their teachers by helping classmates with challenging course material during office hours and during class. For teachers at Pinnacle, spontaneous peer tutoring ensures that teachers have the freedom to teach. Meanwhile, their counterparts at Crossroads lack this freedom, and must instead spend considerable classroom time managing behavior so that students who are committed to credit recovery can do their work in an environment free of distractions. The contrast between Pinnacle and Crossroads is startling in this regard, and

academic segregation is responsible for these separate and unequal teaching and learning environments.

CONCLUSION

Although education can be a powerful tool for social mobility (Telles 2010), schools serving racially segregated poor and working class communities are often lack necessary resources and are inadvertently complicit in reproducing socioeconomic (Bowles and Gintis 1976; MacLeod 1995; McDonough 1997) and ethnoracial (Lewis 2003; Noguera 2003b; Shedd 2015) stratification. However, the mechanisms of social reproduction in education are not limited to schools serving disadvantaged communities. In this chapter, we see that “high performing” and highly ranked schools also reproduce inequality in racially diverse, affluent, suburban communities by shepherding the most academically disadvantaged students to a continuation school with incomplete institutional resources. I refer to this process as academic segregation because these discarded students – who are disproportionately Black, Latino, and working class – are deliberately segregated on academic grounds.

Whereas contemporary school segregation is typically rooted in residential segregation, academic segregation is rooted in an institution’s commitment to protect and bolster its success frame over the needs of individual students. As a result, it privileges the highest achievers while marginalizing those who are average or mediocre. Moreover, it shepherds the lowest achievers to a separate school–Crossroads–with such limited resources that graduates are ineligible for admission into a four-year university immediately upon graduation.

Scholars have previously studied school inequality in the absence of neighborhood segregation by analyzing the ways in which schools structure opportunity by sorting students within schools through academic tracking (Lewis and Diamond 2015; Lucas 1999; Oakes 1985).

Unlike tracking, which occurs within schools, academic segregation is an institutional process of school segregation that ejects struggling students from one high school to another. It banishes students from highly resourced and academically rigorous schools like Pinnacle High School, and sends them to Crossroads High School—a continuation school with metal fences, locked gates, conspicuous police patrol, and a curriculum that limits students’ post-secondary options to community college or trade school, regardless of how well they perform. This case illustrates the ways in which school segregation exists within a public school district, entirely independent of the forces of residential segregation.

This case also contributes to our understanding of how frames operate at the institutional level. Sociologists have shown that East Asian immigrant parents adopt a rigid “success frame” regarding the academic achievement of their children, such that excellent grades and admission to a highly ranked American university are the standards of success in high school. These standards motivate students to academically excel, but at a cost. Asian students who do not measure up feel like failures and ethnic outliers (Lee, Drake and Zhou, *forthcoming*). A similar framing of academic success exists at Pinnacle, where the academic culture is highly competitive and students compete with their classmates for the best grades, test scores, acceptance to top ranked colleges, and other academic distinctions.

At Pinnacle, however, it is not only the Asian students who feel like outliers if they do not meet the standards of a specific ethnoracial success frame; all students, regardless of race or ethnicity, must contend with an *institutional success frame* in which “honors” or “advanced” course placement, strong academic effort, and an impressive grade point average are expected and associated with high social status. While the majority of students, exceptional or not, are able to manage the workload and stress, others struggle to cope. The most at-risk students—who

are disproportionately Black, Latino, and working class—become subject to academic segregation. Academic segregation produces schools with a disproportionately high percentage of students who are underrepresented minority, socioeconomically disadvantaged, learning disabled, deficient in English (reading, writing, or speaking), and that score far below district and state averages on standardized tests.

These mechanisms work to maintain Pinnacle High School’s relatively elite institutional status, and the stated purpose of Crossroads as a welcoming environment for students who desire an alternative, nurturing high school setting is thwarted, in part, by Pinnacle’s concern for its reputation as an academically exceptional institution. Pinnacle can manage and protect its enviable reputation as a “national exemplary” and “California distinguished” school by jettisoning students who are behind on their coursework and are in danger of failing to graduate on time. Comprehensive high schools like Pinnacle use Crossroads as a “dumping ground” – a place to send students whose low academic performance might damage the school’s lofty reputation. Thus, at Pinnacle, academic segregation supports the school’s rigid institutional success frame by absolving the school of the responsibility of educating all of its students. Furthermore, in some cases, Pinnacle selectively utilizes the talents of its students to enhance its reputation by allowing Crossroads students to participate in sports at Pinnacle, but barring those very same students from attending classes, thereby protecting its academic reputation.

Finally, this case contributes to a burgeoning research stream grounded in “inhabited institutions” organizational theory, which argues that institutions are “inhabited” within agentic, institutional actors whose interpretations of institutional processes may vary (Binder 2007; Hallett 2010; Hallett and Ventresca 2006). Such variations shape and guide institutional functioning. At Pinnacle, portions of architecture and landscape, classroom decorations,

pedagogy, administrators, and the majority of students and their parents espouse the institutional success frame in ways that produce a coherent organization culture of academic engagement and achievement.

However, a coherent and dominant organization culture need not be one in which all institutional actors subscribe to its tenets. At Pinnacle, struggling students and their parents routinely question the merits of the institutional success frame, and the legitimacy and purpose of sending students to Crossroads, particularly in cases where a student has not yet reached the “credit deficiency” threshold. Their misgivings manifest as resistance, and assistant principals and counselors customarily engage these students and families in contentious debates on institutional functioning. And there is also widespread pushback against the success frame and continuation school transfer process from various institutional actors at Crossroads, so much so that there is a coherent organizational culture at Crossroads that rejects the narrow, exacting definition of achievement at Pinnacle, and disapproves of the academic segregation, stigma, and reduced opportunities that Crossroads students experience.

All told, this multi-level analysis of various individuals within neighboring, disparate high school environments indicates that academic segregation and the institutional success frame are synergistic. Just as the academic segregation process supports the success frame, Pinnacle institutional actors use the success frame to legitimize a process of racial and class segregation. Racial and class segregation, and the reproduction of inequality, are justified on academic grounds.

CHAPTER 3:

THE CRIMINALIZATION OF “MEDIOCRITY”

A graduation ceremony is a special occasion at any school, but graduation at Crossroads High School is particularly momentous. Crossroads is a continuation school that draws its students from the four comprehensive high schools in the Valley View Unified School District (VVUSD). Students are sent to Crossroads when they have fallen behind on course credits such that they are no longer on normative time to graduate. As such, graduation from Crossroads represents hard work in overcoming challenges and setbacks on one’s academic journey. However, in addition to the academic struggles that all Crossroads graduates must vanquish, the experience of being sent to Crossroads, and one’s status as a Crossroads student, are also significant challenges. Consider these opening remarks by Mr. Reyes, a history teacher at Crossroads, in his commencement address to the graduating class:

Failures! [*long pause*] Failures. For a good majority of those graduating today, that is the view that was cast upon you at one time or another while on your journey to this very moment. For some of you, you were branded a failure because of the choices you made academically or socially. Others of you had that label thrust upon you as a result of actions that were out of your control. Regardless, most of you showed up on your first day here at Crossroads with that same look of, ‘I can’t believe I ended up here,’ on your face... The point is not that you were branded a failure; the point is that you took that image the world had of you, balled it up, and proudly threw that image into a proverbial wastebasket. Graduates, you are not failures. You are proof that failure does not define a person. You have demonstrated that, although we may fall, what is important is that we pick ourselves back up, dust ourselves off, and move forward.

Mr. Reyes's comments are germane to the experiences of the overwhelming majority of Crossroads students. He speaks of the prevailing perception in Valley View that Crossroads is a school for failures and delinquents. At Crossroads High School, failure is a consistent theme, even during celebratory ceremonies.

Processes of surveillance and criminalization are common in urban public schools, where features such as law enforcement officers and surveillance cameras distract from an understanding of students' most basic needs (Kupchik 2010) and have long-term negative consequences for students (Kupchik 2016). In these educational environments, infrastructures based on control and punishment label Black and Latino youth as "dangerous" and "difficult" (Rios 2006). These students, perceived as threatening and troublesome, are disproportionately targeted with punitive policies and surveillance tactics at school (Noguera 2003; Rios 2011), and schools end up resembling and operating as institutions of power and coercive control (Foucault 1977). Carla Shedd observes that, in poor and working-class urban regions like Chicago's South Side, "the technologies and imperatives of the criminal justice system have penetrated our public school system...schools have begun to resemble correctional facilities" (2015:80).

In this chapter, I show that carceral "technologies and imperatives" are not limited to schools serving Black and Latino students in socioeconomically disadvantaged inner-city communities. At Pinnacle High School, the flagship high school in this elite district, academic exceptionalism is routine and expected. Pinnacle marginalizes its struggling students by sending them to neighboring Crossroads High School, a continuation school for students who are deemed off pace to graduate on time from any of the district's four comprehensive high schools.

Crossroads students, who are disproportionately Black and Latino, are inadvertently discredited and criminalized: at school each day, they encounter restrictive metal fences and

gates, panoptic surveillance by armed police, and a curriculum that disqualifies them from direct enrollment in a four-year college following graduation. This segregation, surveillance, and control of students who are struggling academically constitutes a *criminalization of mediocrity* – a subtraction of resources, opportunity, and autonomy for students who do not measure up to the exacting frame of academic success at Valley View’s comprehensive high schools.

“THEY BUILT THIS SCHOOL ACCORDING TO A PRISON MODEL”

The arrangement between Crossroads and the district’s four mainstream high schools stipulates that students are transferred to Crossroads because of academic underperformance, not behavioral problems. Nevertheless, the physical space has multiple features that are common of schools located in urban underclass neighborhoods plagued by violence and illicit activity (Shedd 2015). The grass beside the school is uncut and growing wildly, and the hedge that frames one of the main entrances is brown, skeletal, and dead. The school’s façade is defined by a flat roof that is approximately the same height as the ceiling inside – a design that resembles a series of trailers. Crossroads’s classroom buildings and main office comprise three sides of a rectangle that insures that students are always visible when they are outside of a classroom or the main office, and three permanent spotlight towers line the longer of the two rows of classrooms.

The most striking physical aspect of Crossroads is an imposing black metal fence that runs around the school perimeter. The fence features thick bars that rise approximately eight feet high. There are no openings in this fence, except for two gates that are opened by staff at the beginning and end of each school day, but otherwise remain closed and locked at all times. The fence and locked gates are not criminalizing by themselves; many schools sit on grounds delineated by fences, bars, and locked gates. However, these elements of the school campus at

Crossroads are criminalizing when considered within the broader context of Valley View high schools. Crossroads is the only high school in the district with a perimeter fence and gates that remain locked once the first bell sounds signaling the start of the school day, an unflattering distinction that renders the space as fundamentally disciplinary.

The fence is wildly unpopular among members of the Crossroads community, including students, parents, teachers, and administrators. On a cool spring morning, I encountered Mr. Johnson, the school principal, standing on the concrete outside of his office as he observed students during a passing period. During the course of our brief conversation, Mr. Johnson volunteered criticisms of the school's criminalizing setup:

The district built this school according to a prison model, which is unfortunate. Quite frankly, I don't think it's appropriate as a high school setting. The fence is a problem because it sends a message that these are bad kids. So I'd love to take that damn fence down.

Indeed, there is broad consensus among Crossroads students that the school's physical appearance makes coming to school an unpleasant experience; students often feel as though they are spending their days somewhere far more punitive than a high school. For example, Miranda, a 17-year-old eleventh-grader, was making good grades at one of the district's comprehensive high schools, but she decided to follow in her brother's footsteps and graduate early to join the Navy. Her parents withdrew her from her high school and enrolled her at Crossroads so that she could earn credits quickly and graduate at the end of her junior year. However, once enrolled at Crossroads, Miranda regretted her decision almost immediately:

My mom's apartment is nearby, so I would always drive by [Crossroads], and I was always like, "What is that place?" I would have guessed that it was some sort of jail or something because it looks scary. And the first day I came for registration I had to come by myself, so the map on my phone took me here and I was in disbelief like, "No way! This is the school I'm going to?! Oh my God."

The school's physically austere features contribute to an unwelcoming environment that, for many students, feels more like a punishment than an opportunity for academic improvement.

Separate and Unequal: From Freedom to Confinement

When compared to each comprehensive high school in the district, Crossroads is a separate and unequal school for students who struggle academically. Some of the most striking examples of this inequality are evident in the difference in simple campus privileges that students have at Crossroads and the comprehensive high schools. For example, Pinnacle High School is an "open campus"; there are no fence or gates, and students can enter the school from multiple sides. Like Crossroads, Pinnacle has one police officer assigned to the school. But because the school is large and the officer cannot be in two places at once, most students arrive and enter Pinnacle without encountering the police officer. In contrast, all Crossroads students must walk directly passed a police officer in order to enter school each morning.

At lunchtime, Pinnacle students are free to leave campus. During the Pinnacle lunch period, one can often see a stream of dozens of students walking in small groups down one of the main streets near campus. Some head to a gas station about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away, where they can buy snacks and drinks. Others continue across the street from the gas station to an upscale strip mall that contains several small restaurants and a grocery store. Many Pinnacle students drive to school, and they use lunchtime as a chance to hang out in the parking lot at their car or a friend's car.

Unlike their peers at Pinnacle, students at Crossroads enter and exit the school through a gate, and this entrance stands as the only way that they are allowed to enter the school. The gates are closed and locked once the first-period bell sounds, and they remain locked until the school day is over. Since the gates remain locked for the duration of the school day, and the

fence runs around the entire perimeter of the campus, students cannot leave during lunchtime. Crossroads is the only high school in Valley View that does not grant off-campus privileges to students during lunchtime or other breaks in the academic schedule. Whereas Pinnacle students can walk to one of several local eateries, Crossroads students are restricted to walking across the pavement of the outdoor courtyard to a kiosk where they can receive lunch or a small snack. As a result, Crossroads students experience nowhere near the level of physical freedom that their counterparts at Pinnacle do.

A Conspicuous Police Presence

Crossroads students' school day is one of confinement and surveillance. The near constant surveillance of Crossroads students is enhanced by the unique positioning and behaviors of the Valley View police officer stationed at the school. A squad car from the Valley View Irvine Police Department is often parked out in the parking lot in front of each high school in Valley View as it is at Crossroads, but police presence at other Valley View high schools is quite different than police presence at Crossroads. At the four mainstream high schools in Valley View, the police officer assigned to the school can most often be found in or around the main office, near the front entrance of the school. The officer will occasionally venture to other parts of the campus, but this typically happens in response to a specific call for help or a need to monitor a particular event or scene, such as a pep rally before a football contest against a crosstown rival. Most of the time the police officer is out of sight and out of mind.

In stark contrast, Crossroads High School has a highly visible police presence, which contributes significantly to the school's punitive climate. The police officer assigned to Crossroads is rarely ever seen in front of the school, except to observe arrival and departure at the beginning and end of each school day. An SUV or squad car from the Valley View Police

Department remains conspicuously parked next to the curb in front of the school during business hours. Instead of hanging out in the main office or in front of the school as at other local high schools, the Crossroads police officer observes and patrols the yard during the lunch period and breaks between classes. This difference in police posture and positioning between Crossroads and each of the mainstream high schools signals a corresponding difference in the perception of the student populations at each school. At the mainstream high schools, police tend to stay near the main entrance, which suggests that police presence is meant to protect the school community from outsiders. At Crossroads, police placement on the yard between classrooms suggests that this conspicuous presence of law enforcement is meant to protect students from their classmates and to protect teachers from students.

Many students felt that the distinct police presence at Crossroads, coupled with the perimeter fence and locked gates, signaled a lack of trust from teachers and administrators. Furthermore, students interpreted this lack of trust as unjust since Crossroads purports to be a school for students with academic problems, not disciplinary problems. Janet, a Filipino tenth-grader, expressed views that I found to be representative:

Over at Pinnacle, you see the cop just a little bit here and there, mostly up at the front of the school. That school has trust in students. Here [at Crossroads] it's just way too over protective. The cop is here and he's armed and always watching us, and it shows that they don't have trust in us. And, on top of that, we're fenced in all day. It makes us feel like we're bad kids or something, but we're not.

Officer Francis, the policeman assigned to Crossroads during my second year of fieldwork, agreed with this sentiment. He blamed a general culture of affluence and high achievement in Valley View for the features of Crossroads that made it feel more like punishment than school for most students: "All the security stuff here [at Crossroads] is a little over the top. But this is Valley View, so they freak out easily around here. In terms of the kids that go here, these aren't

bad kids and this would be like a normal high school in a lot of places, just not in Valley View!” Taken together, and particularly when compared to the comprehensive high schools in the district, Crossroads’s physical features contribute to an unwelcoming and punitive atmosphere of confinement, panoptic surveillance, and control. Furthermore, the school infrastructure is problematic to various institutional actors including Principal Johnson and Officer Francis, who are charged with enforcing rules and maintaining order.

Institutional Stigma

Crossroads High School occupies a stigmatized and marginalized position in the Valley View Unified School District, where the school is stereotyped as a place for juvenile delinquents who are lazy, violent, and prone to substance abuse. At Pinnacle High School, Crossroads is infamous as a school that signifies failure – a school for youth who have failed both as students and as people. For example, Ms. Reynolds, a VVUSD substitute teacher in her mid-twenties who often subs at Pinnacle High School, told me that, despite never having been to Crossroads, she refuses to teach there because she does not want to be, “terrorized by a bunch of bad kids.”

Many teachers believed that this negative reputation was warranted. For example, the U.S. Army holds information and recruitment sessions for students at each high school in Valley View. After sitting in on a presentation at Pinnacle I remark to Ms. Quinn, a history teacher, that it seems as though Crossroads would be a better place for the Army to recruit than Pinnacle, given that Crossroads graduates have far fewer post-secondary school options than their peers at Pinnacle. Ms. Quinn does not hesitate in her response: “The Army recruits at Pinnacle because they want highly competent, high-ranking officers; they recruit at Crossroads because they need infantry.” The implication of this analogy is clear: Crossroads students are expendable and of less value to society than Pinnacle students.

Crossroads also has an exceedingly negative reputation among students. During a conversation with Mehdi, a 16-year-old Persian eleventh-grader at Pinnacle and the son of college professors, and Patrick, a 17-year-old Asian eleventh-grader whose parents each earned a PhD in chemistry, they summarized the common perception of Crossroads held by Pinnacle students:

Mehdi: If you get expelled for some reason, you go to Crossroads. Crossroads is like the penitentiary for students. If you go to Crossroads, you have failed miserably as a student and a person.

Patrick: Yeah, Crossroads is the bad one. It's the bad school. It's almost like, if you mess up, then you go there, so it's almost like a prison. Because if you mess up here, then you go over there, and you're done for life, pretty much.

For students in Valley View, Crossroads was an institutional symbol of spectacular failure. Moreover, Pinnacle students understood the long-term consequences of enrolling at Crossroads, which is evident in Patrick's comment that students who end up at Crossroads are "done for life, pretty much."

As a result of this reputation, students who were transferred to Crossroads often reported strong feelings of dread at the thought of attending a school with such an awful reputation. For example, Sarah, an 18-year-old twelfth-grader who emigrated to the United States from Iran at the age of 9, was terrified of going to Crossroads:

I heard that the kids at Crossroads are all like drug addicts, and someone said they rape people in the bathrooms. Kids smoke everywhere. It's crazy, the stuff I heard. I got so terrified, I literally cried my eyes out when my counselor said I had to come here [to Crossroads]. Even the first day here, I came through the office and I didn't wanna come inside because I was so scared.

In addition to fear, Crossroads students often expressed a great deal of shame and embarrassment, feelings that were frequently echoed by other family members as well. In a conversation during lunch period with Juan, an 18-year-old twelfth-grader, he told me that his

father, a real estate agent, was dismayed when he found out that Juan was being transferred to Crossroads: “My dad believed that Crossroads was a school for bad kids who do drugs and make trouble. He felt that me being here would downgrade our family name.” According to Juan, his father also feared for his real estate business; he worried that if his clients found out that his son was attending Crossroads, they would not want to do business with him:

I usually go with my dad to look at houses with his customers. They ask me, “Where do you go to school,” and I used to tell them, “Crossroads,” but my dad was like, “Don’t tell them that.” He thought it would be bad for his business and the family. So now I just lie and tell his customers that I go to Pinnacle.

Similarly, Miranda and her family were ashamed that she was a Crossroads student, so they kept it a secret from extended family:

It’s so embarrassing. My parents don’t tell anyone I go to Crossroads, not even family members. My dad is really good friends with a lot of people in our community, and everyone thinks that kids that go to Crossroads are, like, drug addicts and stuff. So, if people knew I went here they would all think that I did something bad, but I didn’t.

These examples illustrate the overwhelmingly negative perception of Crossroads High School in the local community, a reputation that can disgrace students and their families, so much so that family members fear for the well-being of their careers, and lie to other family and friends in order to save face.

Over the course of my fieldwork I discovered that, although the stigma of being at Crossroads affected students regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, or race, certain students had a harder time dealing with their status. The “model minority” stereotype of Asian cultural values and academic success (Kao 1995) is prevalent in Valley View’s public schools given the high percentage of affluent Asian students and families. Furthermore, Lee and Zhou’s (2015) “success frame,” which denotes the demanding and exacting perceptions of achievement that East Asian immigrant parents often hold for their children in American schools, is also readily

apparent at all levels of primary and secondary school. This cultural orientation toward school increases the stigma that some Asian students feel when they are transferred to Crossroads. On my first day of observation, one of the school counselors told me, “Coming here can be hard on all students, but the Asians seem to take it the worst. I’ve had Asian students tell me that they are the shame of their family. It’s like they are dishonoring their proud immigrant families.” Asian students at Crossroads have fallen woefully short of the positive academic stereotypes associated with their race, and also failed to live up to the exacting standards of the “success frame” that their families have of them.

Crossroads is also stigmatizing for teachers. Hints of this stigma emerge in the teacher application process. When a prospective teacher applies to teach in the VVUSD, he or she submits a single application to the district, which is then passed along to schools and departments that are hiring. Mr. Gregory, a math and science teacher in his first year at Crossroads, recalled a conversation he had with Mr. Johnson’s assistant, Louise, during his application process. Louise called Mr. Gregory to offer him an interview for an open position. According to Mr. Gregory, Louise asked several times if he was clear that Crossroads was a continuation high school, if he had any questions about the ways in which a continuation high school is different from a comprehensive high school, and if he was willing to interview for a position at a continuation school. Louise explained to Mr. Gregory that a lot of applicants turn down interview offers at Crossroads because they do not want to teach at a continuation school. A popular opinion among VVUSD teachers is that Crossroads teachers are “pigeonholed” and stigmatized as less competent than their colleagues who teach at comprehensive sites, which renders teaching jobs at Crossroads as unattractive. Crossroads staff are aware of this stigma, which is why they attempt to make sure that any teacher they hire is committed to teaching in a continuation school setting.

Mr. Davis, a former history teacher at Crossroads who recently accepted a job as an assistant principal at a nearby comprehensive high school, corroborated the notion that Crossroads teachers are viewed as less competent than their counterparts at comprehensive schools. Mr. Davis began looking for another job just a few weeks after he was hired at Crossroads because he did not want to “be labeled as a continuation school teacher and get stuck teaching at an alternative school for the rest of my career. I had to get out, and a lot of new teachers here feel that way.” Moreover, he was determined to land a job at a comprehensive high school because, as a Crossroads teacher, he felt disrespected and devalued at district meetings, where teachers from comprehensive high schools would avoid sitting with him and his Crossroads colleagues, and easily dismiss his comments and suggestions on various pedagogical issues.

Last year, Mr. Davis nearly landed an assistant principle job at a neighboring high school. He made it through several rounds of interviews and was one of the finalists, but he was not offered the position. Eager to leave Crossroads, Mr. Davis arranged a meeting with the principal of the high school to receive detailed feedback on his application:

The principal was very blunt with me. She told me that the biggest reason I’m not getting the job was because I’m coming from Crossroads, and they were concerned about my ability to handle the rigor of teaching at their school. And the other thing is that they were very, very worried about what their school community would think to have a teacher from Crossroads come in. How would she explain that to the parents?

For teachers, the stigma of teaching at Crossroads limits the opportunities for those looking to teach elsewhere. For students, the shame and embarrassment of attending Crossroads is acute, and this stigma extends to parents (and other family members) who make efforts to dissociate themselves and their family from the school.

The Consequences of Funneling Struggling Students to the Same School

Due to its status as a continuation school, Crossroads is a school where all students have faced academic challenges and are behind on their coursework. Some students like Hassan, a 16-year-old African American eleventh-grader, and Matthew, a tenth-grader who emigrated from Vietnam with his parents when he was a toddler, fell behind because they relocated to Valley View in the middle of the school year. After their moves, Hassan and Matthew had trouble adjusting to the combination of living in a new city and the rigorous academic demands typical of the VVUSD. After enrolling at Crossroads and befriending other disaffected students, Hassan and Matthew began experimenting with drugs and alcohol to cope with dispiriting failures at school, and the shame of being, as Hassan put it, “sentenced to serve time at Crossroads.” Thus, for these students, Crossroads offered more distractions than opportunities.

At Crossroads, the disappointment and shame that many students feel in being sent to the school, and the institutional culture of mistrust between students and teachers, results in a sizeable minority of students who are apathetic about their schoolwork and defiant toward their teachers. This troubling dynamic creates challenges and distractions for students who are motivated to recover credits and return to their comprehensive high school, or motivated to graduate on time from Crossroads. The environment also causes some students to become, as one counselor put it, “crossified” – to begin their time at Crossroads motivated to work hard and make up credits, but to gradually slip into a pattern of defiance, disrespect, and academic apathy exhibited by many of their classmates. Coleman, an African American twelfth-grader, saw this pattern as the school’s biggest problem:

I definitely see kids changing while they’re here [at Crossroads]. Most kids come here just for credits, and then they get connected with other connects and all the plugs for the drugs and then they have everything that they need at the tips of their fingertips. That fucks their whole mind up, and their mentality changes. Instead

of, “I’m just trying to chill with my homies,” it’s, “I’m trying to get fucked up with my homies.” Instead of doing the work, “fuck the work.” It’s a complete contradiction, man. They [school administrators] send you here to restore your credit, but there’s actually a lot more distractions in a worse way here.

After speaking with Coleman about this issue, I followed up by asking teachers if they noticed changes in the comportment of their students over time, for better or worse. I found that Crossroads teachers noticed an alarming trend of gradual disengagement, corroborating Coleman’s assessment. Consider the following exchange with Mr. Davis:

Interviewer: Do you see kids come in a certain way and then they’re here for a long time and they change?

Mr. Davis: Yes, and typically in bad ways. For instance, we have a student who, when she first showed up, she came in and did all her work and tried to catch up on credits. Now within a year she has fallen way, way down, where she used to get straight A’s but now she’s failing and she doesn’t even care. She got mixed in here with the wrong people and basically had continuous opportunities to connect with kids who don’t make smart decisions.

In other words, it is not uncommon for students who arrive at Crossroads determined to work hard, recover credits, and transfer back to their comprehensive high school to, instead, gradually assimilate into the prevailing culture of academic apathy and defiance. At Crossroads, the combination of panoptic surveillance, a perimeter fence and locked gates, and a concentration of struggling students presents challenges for the learning environment in classrooms, particularly for students who are determined to complete their work and catch up on course credits.

Crossroads Teachers as Classroom Managers

The institutional infrastructure at Crossroads disadvantages teachers in ways that are not uniform across all high schools in the district. Crossroads teachers and administrators are adamant that Crossroads is not a disciplinary school since district policy dictates that students are to be sent there because they are credit deficient and not because of behavioral problems. Behavior

problems alone are not grounds for a student to be sent to Crossroads. However, according to Dr. Owens, “The discipline [at Crossroads] is horrible. There is a lot of disrespectful, defiant behavior going on. There’s not fights here or stuff like that, but the defiance and the disrespect is pretty bad.” As such, the Crossroads environment presents various challenges to teachers, who must constantly manage their classrooms and keep students on task. The following excerpt of field notes is illustrative:

Ms. Turner [English teacher] spends most of her energy keeping students on task. She is constantly managing the class, telling a small group of students to quiet down, asking a girl to put away her cellphone, and frequently deriding the entire class for their lack of maturity and focus. After about 10 minutes of this, Tobias, a short, slender boy of West African and Portuguese descent, questions Ms. Turner’s choice of profession: “I think you should work at a library, where nobody talks.” Ms. Turner continues her attempt at facilitating a productive discussion of the novel, but her progress is mired by constant interruption from various members of the class. Finally, exasperated, she addresses the entire class: “When the teacher is reading, please at least *act* like you’re listening. It makes me feel good. *It makes me feel like a teacher.*”

Such disruptions, which are frequent at Crossroads, undermine a teacher’s authority and shift the focus from teaching to a persistent need to keep and restore order in an otherwise disorderly classroom. As a result, teachers at Crossroads frequently express frustrations in their inability to teach, and describe their jobs as fundamentally disciplinary in nature. Many, like Ms. Turner, report that on many days they do not feel much like teachers at all.

In stark contrast, teachers at other Valley View High Schools have the freedom to teach unencumbered by the defiant apathy that spreads through classrooms at Crossroads. For example, at Pinnacle High School, Ms. Potter, who teaches chemistry, can count on her students to focus once she begins the day’s lesson. Ms. Potter does not need to spend any time quieting the classroom before beginning the lesson, or in maintaining her students’ attention during the lesson. These luxuries allow her to spend nearly all of her time and energy on teaching. Indeed,

students who pay close attention during class sometimes still struggle with certain concepts and need extra instruction, but this fact underscores another benefit of the common classroom culture at Pinnacle High School – students who assist their teachers by helping classmates with challenging course material both during class and during office hours. Ms. Potter was full of effusive praise for her students who helped their classmates. These students made her job easier:

It's awesome! They help each other during class, but sometimes, particularly during office hours, if there are several students there and maybe they have different questions, I can call over another student like, 'Hey, come help them with this.' It makes my job so much easier.

During my ethnographic observations at Pinnacle High School, I witnessed this type of peer tutoring in every academic track, and it constitutes a tremendous pedagogical resource for teachers and students. For teachers at Pinnacle, spontaneous peer tutoring ensures that teachers have the freedom to teach.

Meanwhile, their counterparts at Crossroads often lack this freedom, and must instead spend considerable classroom time managing behavior so that students who are way behind can catch up, and so that students who are committed to credit recovery can do their work in an environment free of distraction. The contrast between Crossroads and Pinnacle is startling in this regard. The most capable students at Crossroads succeed, in part, because they are able to ignore the provocations of their classmates and maintain a singular focus on their work. As such, high achievers at Crossroads rarely interact with their peers who need extra help. Thus, when struggling students are concentrated in one school and fences confine them to that space, the result is a set of classroom environments that do little to motivate apathetic students, are challenging and distracting for students who are motivated, and are detrimental to the pedagogical efficacy of teachers.

SUBTRACTING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the following paragraphs I introduce two Crossroads students – Miguel and Anna – whose experiences and backgrounds illuminate the ways in which the continuation school system affects students who become entangled in its punitive web. Miguel, who is Latino, does not enjoy traditional subjects like math and science, but he has a passion for culinary arts and a goal to become a chef. Anna, who is White, has always been a strong student, but she recently moved to Valley View after three years of high school in Europe, and her new neighborhood high school turned her away on registration day and sent her to Crossroads for credit recovery.

Miguel and the Devaluation of Vocational Training

Some Crossroads students encountered difficulty at their comprehensive high schools because they were not interested in traditional subjects like math and science. Miguel, a Mexican-American eleventh-grader at Crossroads, is one such student. Miguel failed two classes at the end of his tenth-grade year. He did not enjoy traditional high school courses like algebra and chemistry; instead, he wanted to be a chef in a restaurant. The Valley View Unified School district provides several vocational classes as part of a “career technical education program” (CTEP). Students who are enrolled in this program must still meet graduation requirement at their high school, but their vocational training also counts toward their degree. Miguel took advantage of this opportunity and was happily enrolled in the “culinary arts” program. However, he struggled to maintain his focus in classes at Crossroads, and he had difficulty arriving on time for first period.

Miguel was one of many students at Crossroads who struggled with tardiness, especially for the first bell of the day at 8:15am. Consequently, teachers and administrators reasoned that they would drop a student’s first period class once they were late eight times during a semester.

Students like Miguel would also be dropped CTEP because, according to Principal Johnson, “CTEP is a privilege that is earned, so it can also be taken away.” Sure enough, Miguel was dropped from his culinary arts course, a move that frustrated Mr. Gregory:

Culinary arts was the one thing that Miguel liked in terms of school. It was the one thing that he was really engaged in, and now it’s gone. We want these kids to find their passion, and so I don’t think we should punish them by taking that away.

No longer in culinary arts, Miguel began skipping school altogether. When I asked Miguel about the decision to drop him from culinary arts, he shrugged and replied, “I mean, it sucks. It was really the only reason I was coming here [to Crossroads]. Now I don’t really have a reason to be here because I just want to be a chef.” For Miguel, his loss was more than the revocation of an extracurricular “privilege”; he lost his lifeline to a meaningful career of his choice.

Anna and the Academic Segregation of Students New to Valley View

Anna, a twelfth-grader at Crossroads, was born in Florida but moved to Budapest, Hungary as a child when her father, a university professor, took a job there. According to Anna, she has always been a “strong student” who earned good grades in school and had the respect of her teachers as a hard worker. In middle school, she set a goal to attend a prestigious college after high school.

Anna’s educational trajectory changed when she and her family moved to Valley View during the summer before her final year of high school. Once in Valley View, Anna was unable to enroll at her neighborhood comprehensive high school because the school was unable to accept all of her coursework from her school in Budapest. This immediately left her “credit deficient” and in need of “credit recovery” at Crossroads so that she could graduate on time. Anna was initially comfortable with this plan, but she grew apprehensive when she sought

information about Crossroads. Her heart sank as, one after another, students told her that Crossroads was a prisonlike school for students who did poorly academically. Anna did not think that she belonged at such a school.

Expecting the worst, Anna committed to working as hard as possible to recover her credits and graduate on time. Although she made a few friends at Crossroads, Anna has largely kept to herself to avoid distractions. Now ahead of schedule for graduation, Anna maintains a 4.0 grade point average at Crossroads, but she expresses disappointment in her lack of options for college due to the dearth of course offerings in the Crossroads curriculum. Thus, despite a long-held ambition to attend a top college, and the grades to back up that goal, Anna will attend a local community college in the fall. Meanwhile, Anna's sister, who "has never been a strong student or cared much about school," was able to enroll at Pinnacle and gain access to the resources of an elite public high school because she had yet to start high school when the family moved to Valley View.

Miguel's case illustrates the ways in which the Valley View Unified School district responds to students who run into academic difficulty. When these difficulties persist, the school system disinvests in the education of these students. Miguel's punishment for struggling to arrive to his history class on time was the revocation of his status as a culinary arts student, the only aspect of his academic high school experience that he enjoyed. It is common for Crossroads students to be interested in vocational education that allows them to build a skill and pursue gainful, fulltime employment directly after high school, but Miguel's case illustrates the way in which these interests are devalued easily dismissed.

Anna's case is an example of the way in which the criminalization of students in Valley View extends beyond students who are Black, Latino, or struggling in school. Though she was

by all accounts a stellar student and had plans to attend a prestigious four-year college after high school, Anna was designated as “credit deficient” because she began her high school career in Europe. As a result, she was turned away from her neighborhood comprehensive high school and sent to Crossroads, where course offerings are limited such that her only option after graduation was to enroll in community college.

CONCLUSION

The growing carceral function of urban public schools has increasingly brought students who “misbehave” in contact with police officers instead of teachers, counselors, or principals, and is “socializing students to prisonlike conditions” (Shedd 2015:118). Public high schools in working-class urban neighborhoods engage in the disproportionate criminalization of Black and Latino students, a phenomenon that researchers have documented in cities across the United States from Oakland (Noguera 2003; Rios 2011), to Chicago (Shedd 2015), to New York (Lopez 2003). But, as my observations and conversations with students and various institutional actors make clear, the disproportionate criminalization of Black and Latino students is not limited to inner-city schools or students who “misbehave.”

In Valley View, students are criminalized not for their bad behavior, but for their academic struggles – treatment that I term the *criminalization of mediocrity*. The district boasts a set of comprehensive high schools that are academically elite, where exceptional achievement is common and expected. At schools such as Pinnacle, a rigid institutional frame of what it means to be a successful student threatens to cast failure upon students who do not measure up (Author, forthcoming). The further a student deviates, academically, from these standards, the greater the risk of transfer to Crossroads, an alternative high school where the student body is disproportionately Black and Latino. Crossroads students encounter a restrictive perimeter fence

and constant surveillance by teachers, security guards, and an armed police officer. Moreover, due to the school's truncated curriculum, Crossroads graduates are ineligible to enroll in a four-year university, which contributes to the cumulative disadvantage that these students experience. Often, the students most vulnerable to be transferred to Crossroads are those who have moved to Valley View from a neighboring city where they were enrolled in a less rigorous school district. Thus, even stellar students like Anna are segregated academically if the VVUSD does not accept coursework completed in another school district.

Transfer to Crossroads is meant to help such students get back on track academically in an environment with smaller class sizes and less scholastic rigor. However, this form of extreme tracking may work against its objectives. In *Stigma*, Erving Goffman (1963), distinguishes between two types of stigmatized individuals: those who are "discreditable" because of a condition that they must constantly labor to conceal, and those who have been "discredited" and publically shamed. According to Goffman's stigma framework, Crossroads students have been deeply discredited and shamed for struggling academically. In Valley View, the stigma of doing poorly in school is institutionalized and cemented in a transfer to Crossroads. Thus, it is no wonder that negative and often false stereotypes about Crossroads are rampant throughout the Valley View Unified School District, and Crossroads has come to symbolize failure and delinquency. Students who are transferred to Crossroads fear for their safety and both their short- and long-term success, and the shame and embarrassment that they experience is shared by family members.

My findings suggest that creating separate schools for students who are having difficulty may unintended and negatively cumulative consequences. Just as residential segregation purposefully creates and maintains racially homogenous neighborhoods and concentrates social

problems in urban ghettos (Massey and Denton, 1993), the academic segregation in Valley View concentrates struggling students and behavior problems at Crossroads High School, creating an educational context where students who are motivated to succeed face constant disruptions from classmates. Crossroads students are at-risk for succumbing to an academic culture of oppositional apathy created by the grouping of failing students in one high school. These dynamics also affect Crossroads's teachers, who spend more time managing their students than teaching. As a result, accomplished teachers avoid Crossroads, which limits the quality of instruction that students receive. Moreover, their positions at Crossroads teachers mark them as less capable than their counterparts teaching at comprehensive high schools, which works against Crossroads teachers on the job market.

Crossroads presents a stark case of institutional inequality and disadvantage. Nearly half a century ago, sociologist Robert K. Merton (1968; 1988) introduced the concept of *cumulative dis/advantage* to analyze and explain the ways in which disparities in resource allocation and opportunity result in persistent, widening inequality. Merton posited a positive and reciprocal relationship between productivity, opportunity, and resources: productivity leads to opportunities and resources, which facilitate continued productivity. It follows, then, that those who struggle end up with fewer resources and opportunities needed to succeed in the future. Thus, according to Merton, dis/advantage is cumulative, and inequality increases over time. Crossroads is an institutional example of cumulative disadvantage. It is a school where students who are behind on their coursework have been segregated away from a highly-resourced comprehensive high school into an academic environment with far fewer resources, and one that affords far fewer opportunities for graduates. Moreover, the environment at Crossroads is rife with social distractions that complicate and preclude credit recovery for many dedicated students.

In many ways, the policies and practices of criminalization in the VVUSD dovetail with the concept of “subtractive schooling” (Valenzuela 1999). In Valley View, academic difficulty can result in the subtraction of academic resources, most notably when a struggling student is transferred from a highly-resourced school such as Pinnacle to Crossroads, where course offerings are limited and extracurricular activities are nonexistent. Moreover, because there is such a focus in Valley View on college readiness for all students, vocational training is viewed as an extra-curricular “privilege” rather than a path to a meaningful career. This oppositional orientation toward vocational training explains why Miguel, an eleventh-grader at Crossroads with plans to pursue a career as a chef, was pulled from his culinary arts class as punishment for being repeatedly late for his first period history class. For Miguel, this was more than simply a punishment for being tardy; it represented the loss of a lifeline to a meaningful career.

Foucault (1977) analyzes the iconic panopticon prison design, and posits a theory of panopticism – social control predicated on constant surveillance within institutions. Foucault submits that panoptic institutions such as prisons, through a system of graded punishments and unyielding surveillance, maintain order and encourage appropriate behavior and adherence to norms. This type of panoptic arrangement is common in urban, underclass, highly segregated school environments (Noguera 2003b; Wacquant 2001), environments far different from those encountered in affluent, suburban Valley View.

At Crossroads, a combination of panoptic surveillance and gated confinement is, similarly, meant to keep students in line and on task by controlling behavior and ensuring that students focus on their schoolwork. However, my findings reveal that panopticism at Crossroads may in fact work against the school’s educational objectives. The perimeter fence ensures that disruptive students stay on campus all day, which weakens the academic environment for

motivated students and their teachers. The fence and surveillance practices contribute to a pervasive lack of trust between teachers and students. Thus, Crossroads High School functions as a *benevolent panopticon* – an institution that attempts to nurture and guide students, but is physically structured and operated in a fashion that places all students in a punitive context of constant surveillance and control. In Valley View, academic mediocrity has become synonymous with juvenile delinquency and deviant behavior.

CHAPTER 4:

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ETHNIC CAPITAL

Assimilation scholars have consistently described assimilation as a one-sided process. Whether positing that immigrant incorporation into a new society follows a steady trend of boundary dissolution (Gordon 1964), or that different immigrant groups assimilate into various strata within a host society (Portes and Zhou 1993), the underlying premise is that new immigrants gradually conform to mainstream cultures and institutions. Few have considered that assimilation can be a two-sided process in which immigrants greatly influence dominant cultures (Alba and Nee 1997) and institutions. For example, Asian immigrants are altering mainstream conceptions of achievement; in American schools, Asian students are vastly overrepresented among those attaining the highest grades and test scores (Pew Research Center 2012) and enrolled in elite public and private universities. In Silicon Valley, East- and South-Asian immigrants' widespread academic success has led to a reshuffling of the racial hierarchy in schools, such that whiteness has come to be associated with academic mediocrity (Jimenez and Horowitz 2013).

Pundits and scholars have posited various, often contradictory explanations for Asian academic success in America. Asian cultural traits and values are often used to explain this academic achievement, particularly when comparing Asians to other racial groups (Chua and Rubinfeld 2015; Kristoff 2015), and such comparisons reify an image of Asians as a “model minority” group (Kao 1995). Recently, scholars have challenged cultural explanations by

highlighting the far more influential role played by pre-migration socioeconomic status and education levels (Feliciano 2005, 2006). Others have engaged with the concept of culture in bold new ways, arguing that for many East-Asian immigrants, a combination of pre-migration status and favorable contexts of reception in the U.S. have led to the adoption of a cultural “success frame” in which excellence in school and a prestigious career are standards to live by (Lee and Zhou 2015). Immigrant assimilation and social mobility, particularly as related to educational attainment, are also influenced by the strength of co-ethnic networks in the United States and the “ethnic capital” that these networks provide (Zhou 2009; Zhou and Kim 2006; Zhou and Lin 2005).

While scholars have shown how ethnic capital is a resource for second-generation Asians' educational attainment, in this chapter I present data that show how ethnic capital is institutionalized in U.S. schools. I illuminate the institutionalized processes and practices by which Korean and Chinese parents marshal ethnic resources to frame their culture and students as distinct and exceptional. In Valley View, Korean and Chinese parents have formed ethnically segregated parent organizations which frame Asian culture as exceptional and responsible for the academic achievements of their children. These organizations work directly with local schools to enhance the reputation of their ethnic group, the cultural knowledge of teachers, and the education opportunities and achievement of their students. These parent groups also increase their ethnic group reputation and status within the institution by raising and donate substantial sums of money and supplies to local high schools, and lavishing teachers with celebratory luncheons and attractive gifts.

For East-Asian parents in Valley View, the institutionalization of ethnic capital enables them to facilitate a process of assimilation in the local school district that is two-sided; rather

than strictly assimilating to the native school culture and customs, Chinese and South Korean immigrant families and school-based organizations invest in the assimilation of the local education community to their culture by formally and informally instructing local teachers and officials on the most unique and attractive aspects of Chinese and Korean culture, and, crucially, the best methods for educating their students. This *two-sided assimilation* process advantages Korean and Chinese students in local schools by encouraging teachers to acquiesce to their specific cultural orientations, which streamlines the assimilation process for those students and families. Furthermore, the institutionalization of ethnic capital allows these affluent immigrants to remake mainstream definitions of achievement by reifying positive stereotypes about Asians' academic aptitude, which racializes academic success as an "Asian thing."

During my field work, I interviewed five Korean mothers of current Pinnacle students, and I had informal conversations with several others at various school and community events. One morning I met Karen, a Korean mother of two Pinnacle students, to discuss her decision to move to America, and why she chose Valley View and Pinnacle High School. Karen explained that academics are highly competitive in Korea, and that she was worried about the stress that her two children were constantly under as a result. Once she and her husband decided to leave Korea, they quickly settled on a destination, with some help from local media in Seoul:

Valley View is famous in Korea, especially in Seoul. When you go to Korea, if you say, 'Valley View,' most people know where Valley View is because it's in the newspaper and magazines and on television shows and it's advertised as the best place to live in The States because of the public school system. And there is already a large number of Koreans in Valley View, and there are Korean markets everywhere and lots of diverse ethnic restaurants. And Pinnacle is known in Korea, too. Korean families move to Valley View and want to live close to the school so their kids can go there. We felt lucky to find a house nearby.

Valley View's safe neighborhoods, stellar schools, and a large co-ethnic community offer piece of mind for South Koreans looking to emigrate. Once in Valley View, parents like Karen are

able to reap the benefits of the resources and strategies that Asian families in Valley View martial and implement as they assimilate, and these resources and strategies affect students' experiences and opportunities, as well as the strength of the relationship between parents and local schools.

ETHNIC PARENT ORGANIZATIONS: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ETHNIC CAPITAL

Like most public high schools, Pinnacle has a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) that facilitates communication and collaboration between parents, teachers, and students. The PTA raises money for the school for technology enhancements and classroom supplies, helps coordinate various special events, and hosts a series of invited speakers to address topics such as college applications and admissions, and summer internship opportunities for students. The Pinnacle PTA is open to all parents, teachers, and students, and the group is active in recruiting new members. However, Pinnacle also has a Chinese Parent Organization (CPO) and a Korean Parent Organization (KPO) that are separate from the PTA. The CPO and KPO hold their own group meetings and hosts their own events. Only Chinese and Chinese-American parents are permitted to join the CPO, and only Korean and Korean-American parents are eligible to join the KPO. These groups typically have between forty and fifty active members. In this chapter, I focus on the KPO because it is larger and older than the CPO. However, the CPO is modeled after the KPO, and both groups function in similar ways with similar objectives.

I first learned about the KPO and some of its activities from Ms. Quinn, an AP history teacher. During my fieldwork in classrooms, I made a habit of lingering for a few minutes after every class period so that I could speak with the teacher and ask questions. Ms. Quinn was always willing to engage in conversation, and she asked me if I was going to attend the

upcoming “annual teacher appreciation luncheon” hosted by the Korean Parent Organization, which, at the time, was the only ethnic parent group on campus. She did not mince words when describing her unease about the presence and motives of an ethnically exclusive and separate parent group on campus:

The luncheon is bribery by the Korean parents so we’ll treat their students better. It’s a safe bribe. I refuse to go to it. The culture in Korea is that it’s the norm for parents to gift their children’s teachers for the child’s benefit. I’m very American and I find it offensive. Why can’t they just be part of the regular PTA? Why do they need their own separate, exclusive group?

Ms. Quinn also adds that the school day is modified every year for the luncheon, which happens during lunch period, such that the class periods directly before and after lunch are shortened to make more time for the event. This frustrates her because it “eats into instructional time that our students need.” I ask Ms. Quinn how the lunch is structured and what typically happens during the event, and she replies that the KPO will “give a few thousand dollars to the school and feed everyone from an extravagant buffet.” She says that most of the teachers who attend the annual event do not understand why the KPO is necessary when the school already has a PTA, but they go for the free food. I ask her if I can attend the luncheon and she says that I can, digging through the recycling bin under her desk to retrieve her discarded invitation.¹

The Korean Parent Organization Teacher Appreciation Luncheon

The annual KPO Teacher Appreciation Luncheon is an important day for the KPO. The event is held in the Pinnacle multi-purpose room, a rectangular space large enough to accommodate about 200 people. As one enters the event, one is immediately struck by the extravagant decorations from wall to wall. Tables are spread throughout the room, and each table is

¹ The Chinese Parent Organization hosts a similar teacher appreciation lunch each year.

decorated with a tablecloth, candles, and a vase overflowing with white tulips. Each seat is accompanied by a program that includes a short written statement of thanks from the president of the KPO and a list of dishes on the luncheon menu, which is split into appetizer, entrée, and dessert items. Business sponsors and the names of all KPO members and their children who are enrolled at Pinnacle are listed on the back of the program. Dozens of blue, white, purple, orange, green, and yellow paper ornaments hang from the ceiling, and more are arranged clustered together on the wall like giant paper flowers in full bloom.

The KPO presents the food as a buffet with twelve different Korean dishes, and this robust display of Korean cuisine is set up against one of the longer walls of room. A KPO mother stands behind each dish along the buffet line, eager to serve a teacher or staff member. The Korean women are all dressed in casual business attire – many are wearing sweater dresses or slacks, and this choice of clothing suggests that this is an important event for them. A large and colorful banner on the wall behind the food reads “THANK YOU TEACHERS & STAFF”. Three additional tables are placed against each other and run perpendicular to the buffet line. These three tables display an assortment of fruits, cakes, muffins, coffee, and tea.

Teachers and staff begin to arrive and I join the buffet line, glad to embrace my role as a participant-observer with the promise of a free meal. Each server is standing behind the dish that she prepared, willing and able to answer detailed questions about types of meats, spices, and other ingredients. My plate is soon full of dumplings, beef, and steamed rice, as well as several other enticing creations that I cannot identify. I leave the buffet line and take a seat at a table near the front of the room. Three other teachers are already seated at the table, none of whom I recognize from my time spent observing various classrooms at the school. We exchange greetings, and I learn that one of the teachers is a Korean woman in her mid-twenties who

teaches French part-time. I ask her if there are other luncheons like this at Pinnacle during the year. She says that there are a few other luncheons but that this is the only ethnic luncheon and “by far the most extravagant.” A KPO member stops by our table to ask if we are enjoying the food. Everyone, with mouths full of food, nods in agreement.

Soon the buffet line curls around the room and all the tables are full of teachers and staff. I look around the room and count roughly seventy teachers and staff in attendance. A KPO member gets everyone’s attention with the help of a microphone. She and four other members are standing at the front of the room. She thanks all of the “passionate and dedicated Korean parents” for their hard work in making the event possible, and all attendees applaud with gratitude. She ends her brief remarks by saying, “We will continue working hard for our students and the school. Thank you.” She passes the microphone to another Korean mother, who announces a cash donation of \$3,000 from the KPO to Pinnacle as well as an additional \$1,000 of classroom supplies for the school. Her announcement is met with enthusiastic applause.

The luncheon ends with a raffle. Each program has a numbered ticket stapled to it, and the president of the KPO reads the winning numbers. There are dozens of winning numbers. A teacher sitting next to me wins a set of stainless steel cookware. Other prizes include movie tickets, gift cards, small kitchen appliances, and a spa treatment. When the raffle is over, the KPO president announces that all gifts were donated by KPO members and that all food was prepared by KPO members, and she thanks everyone for their attendance and dedication to making Pinnacle “such an exceptional school for our students.”

The luncheon serves at least three important functions for the Korean Parents Organization. First, it is a chance to publically praise and award faculty and staff with an impressive assortment of food and prizes in a festive atmosphere, and to declare a large donation

of money and supplies to the Pinnacle community. Second, the luncheon is an opportunity to reaffirm a commitment to working with the school to support a shared vision of academic exceptionalism through fundraising and partnerships with local businesses. This objective is reflected in comments of KPO members during the lunch that speak to cooperation and hard work “for our students and the school,” as well as the listing of local business sponsors on the back of the official event program.

Third, the luncheon serves to increase the profile of Korean parents and students on campus by underscoring their committed to academic excellence. The event presents Korean parents as caring, committed, and grateful members of the Pinnacle community who are steadfastly invested in the success of their students and the school more broadly. The luncheon reifies the “model minority” stereotype that Asian achievement outpaces that of other non-White groups not because they are naturally smarter, but because they care more about education – a view that is prevalent among members of the KPO and throughout the Pinnacle community. A few weeks after the luncheon I spoke with Sarah, a current member of the KPO, and she referenced culture to explain Asian students’ academic success.: “Culturally, Asians are very school oriented. Education is the number one priority. So, wherever you have a good school district, you’ll find that there will be a lot of Asians, right?” For Sarah, the fact that Asian immigrants tend to settle in good school districts is proof that Asians place a particularly high value on education, and the luncheon is further proof.

Furthermore, the luncheon supports the notion that Korean students and their families, and Asians more broadly, are largely responsible for the Pinnacle’s stellar academic reputation. Pinnacle teachers witness their Asian students outperforming their non-Asian students, and they often wonder why this is the case. The KPO luncheon provides a convenient answer, because it

features Korean parents as deeply devoted to the success of their students. Listing on the back of the event program the Korean students whose parents are members of the KPO signals to teachers that each of those students comes from a family that puts education first.

Some teachers, such as Ms. Quinn, were not comfortable with the luncheon because they viewed it as an attempt on the part of the Korean community to curry special favors from teachers and the administration by showering faculty and staff with praise, personal gifts (often worth hundreds of dollars), and thousands of dollars in lump sum donations to the school. Others perceived the lunch as a harmless tribute to teachers, while acknowledging potential benefits for the Korean community. In a conversation with Mr. Parris, who teaches English, I asked him what he thought of the KPO luncheon:

What are your thoughts about the luncheon hosted by Korean parents?

Mr. Parris: Well, I go for the food! I think most teachers go for the food. And I don't feel any pressure to treat my Korean students differently in order to please their parents. Some teachers might, but I don't.

Importantly, Mr. Parris makes the latter comment, about the treatment of Korean students, on his own without a follow-up question from me. Thus, even though he makes clear that he does not treat his Korean students any differently because of the luncheon, he is obviously aware of the impact that such an event might have on faculty and staff in terms of how they view and treat certain students.

“Language Should Not be a Barrier”: How the Korean Parent Organization Facilitates Assimilation Among Korean Parents and Students

Hannah, president of the Korean Parents Association, is a Korean-American woman in her mid-forties with two daughters at Pinnacle. She was born in Seoul, South Korea, but moved to Valley View with her parents at the age of ten, and is herself a Pinnacle alumna. KPO president is an

elected position that comes with a two-year term. She pursued the position because she felt as though her decades of residence in Valley View, as well as her familiarity with Pinnacle as both a former student and current parent, made her uniquely qualified to advocate on behalf of all Korean parents and their students.

Hannah describes the KPO as a bridge for Korean parents between the way things are in Korea, and the institutions and customs in American that are brand new to them:

A lot of these parents that join our organization are recent immigrants. So, number one, they're not familiar with the educational system here in America because they did not go to school here. Number two, they join for resources and information because of the language barrier. Number three, they come for more of a social aspect because they might not know anyone or have friends here when they come from Korea; they can talk to other moms and see what going on and meet people. So those are the three things that we try to do.

In other words, the KPO provides new immigrant Korean families with a valuable source of social (Coleman 1988) and cultural (DiMaggio 1982) capital that helps them and their children adjust and thrive. Much of the cultural capital comes directly from the regular PTA. Hannah attends all PTA meetings and events, and then relays that information to Korean parents at the separate KPO meetings. She speaks to the group in English, but there is always a translator present to repeat her words in Korean. For Hannah, this is the most important aspect of her job as president of the KPO: "My vision is that I am basically a huge interpreter between the general PTA and the Korean Parent Organization."²

Hannah also sees her role as that of a motivator – a credible source of inspiration for Korean parents to become active, influential members of the Pinnacle community. Indeed, active, visible, and influential participation from the Korean parent community is a key objective of the group. For example, in wake of the news that the school principal was set to leave

² The Chinese Parent Organization shares this primary objective of supporting recent immigrant families by providing translations and information from PTA meetings and other school sources.

Pinnacle at the end of the 2014–2015 schoolyear, the VVUSD sent an administrator to several PTA meetings to gather information from parents on the qualities that they covet in a new principal. Moreover, to further assist in the hiring process, the district opened an online survey for all parents – PTA member or not – to provide feedback on their preferences for a new head of school. Hannah viewed this as a tremendous opportunity for KPO members to be heard when they might otherwise have no input:

I told all my members, ‘Here is your chance to get involved. This is very important. Fill out those surveys.’ Because a lot of the Korean parents will ignore those emails because they are in English. So, I’ve been actively telling my members to fill those surveys out, because I want them to be more a part of the Pinnacle community. See, in the past, a lot of these moms kind of just dropped their kids off and that was it. They don’t get involved because of the language barrier.

Thus, one of the main benefits of the KPO to Korean parents is that the organization supports the acculturation process for new immigrant families by easing the burdens of linguistic assimilation. By facilitating linguistic assimilation, the KPO also supports the structural assimilation of Korean parents from passive observers to influential institutional actors.

The KPO is also directly involved in the academic well-being of Korean students. The most common way in which this occurs is by enrolling students in various standardized test preparation courses. In fact, it is not uncommon for the sons and daughters of KPO parents to begin SAT tutoring prior to 9th-grade, on advice from other parents in the group. In these test prep classes, students meet and interact with co-ethnic peers whose parents all act according to a similar conception of success. Thus, local test prep centers are places where Korean parents and their children – particularly those who are recent immigrants – can bond over a shared educational vision and build community in a new land.

But the Korean Parent Organization also intervenes when Korean students run into difficulty at school, whether the trouble be academic or behavioral. Consider the following exchange with Hannah, president of the KPO:

Hannah: If a student has a problem at school, we'll try to step in and we'll try to help out that student and that family.

What kind of problems do student have where they can come to you and you can intervene?

Hannah: So, we had an issue with this boy being caught cheating; I think it was plagiarism. You know, the parent called and they didn't know what to do because, that kind of thing is a big deal here [in America]; it's a huge deal. So, the parent will call and say, 'We have to have a meeting with the principal and we need help with the interpretation.' and so we [the Pinnacle Korean Parent Organization] send somebody from our group to participate in that meeting and be a mediator.

You'll have someone from the KPO be present with them in their meeting with the principal?

Hannah Yes, for interpretation and counsel. And so, in the plagiarism case, we were able to resolve it nicely and it didn't end up on that kid's academic record.

Esther, who served as a liaison to the PTA before Hannah took over that role as KPO president, indicated that, in addition to relaying information back and forth between the separate PTA and KPO meetings, she also worked with parents to assist Korean students who found themselves in trouble in some way:

Esther: When I worked as a liaison, I had several instances when parents called me for help. This is a really unbelievable story, actually. On a Thursday night, I get a phone call from a mother in the KPO that I had never met before. She called me frantically in regard to her son who is about to get expelled. I asked her what happened and she mentioned that he was caught smoking on campus and it was his second or third time. She said, 'can you do me a favor and talk to the school in regard to the expulsion?' She mentioned that this will affect his college admission, and she started making excuses about why her son was misbehaving.

Excuses to you?

Esther: Yes, to me. She said that the reason was because the father is in Korea and the son is here feeling stressed. As a result, he started smoking and there's

nothing much she can do about it. I said ‘no, that's not gonna fly.’ (Laughs). I told her to be sure to talk to them and tell them that he needs help. And I helped her write a letter to the school. He ended up getting three days of suspension and he had to go to school on Saturdays for a few weeks.

So, he wasn't expelled.

Esther: He wasn't expelled, but suspended instead. And six months later I ran into the mom and she told me that it was the best thing that had ever happened to them and that her son had matured a lot. So it ended up being a great experience.

These examples show how the Korean Parent Organization marshals resources on behalf of parents and students who are in urgent need of assistance. The group offers support and counsel to parents and students, as well as translators to accompany parents in meetings with school administrators. These tactics have proven quite effective due to the strong reputation that the Korean community has built at Pinnacle, and the close relationship between the KPO and the Pinnacle administration. Pinnacle faculty and staff view members of the Korean community, and the KPO especially, as partners in an effort to provide an outstanding public education to gifted, motivated students, and both sides work to maintain and strengthen this partnership. When a Korean boy was caught plagiarizing a term paper, the KPO intervened by sending a “mediator” with the boy’s parents to provide support and, if needed, translation during a meeting with the principal to discuss discipline. When another boy was caught smoking on campus, the boy’s mother reached out to the KPO for help, and the KPO worked with her to ensure that the boy was suspended and not expelled.

The Korean Cultural Education Program: Facilitating Immigration as a Two-Sided Process

Assimilation is a process that occurs when groups meet through which a new group becomes incorporated into an existing society and group boundaries are diminished (Gordon 1964). This

classic definition implies that the flow of group incorporation is unidirectional as the “new group” acculturates into the “existing society.” For instance, in the case of immigrants who do not speak English upon arrival in America, learning the new language is critically important. It is also vital to learn cultural customs, such as the practice of hand-raising for youth in classrooms.

Highly- and hyper-selected immigrant groups, those whose pre-migration levels of educational attainment and socioeconomic status outpace the median in both their country of origin and the United States, tend to do quite well assimilating culturally and structurally because they have the resources to facilitate rapid incorporation into the existing society (Feliciano 2005, 2006; Lee and Zhou 2015). The establishment of the Korean Parent Organization by affluent Korean immigrants in Valley View is a case in point. As detailed above, the primary objectives of the KPO are to support Pinnacle through fundraising and community outreach, and to provide social and cultural capital to all Korean families. The provision of social and cultural capital is particularly important for new immigrant members as they adjust to American institutions and cultural customs.

However, by directly engaging VVUSD teachers in the acculturation process, the KPO goes beyond merely supporting its group members in the process of assimilation. Every summer since 2007, the Valley View Korean Parents Organization, of which the Pinnacle KPO as well as the KPO groups at other Valley View high schools are a part, and the Valley View Public School Foundation team up to host a three-day workshop for Valley View teachers. This Korean Cultural Education Program (KCEP) is open to all public school teachers in Valley View at the elementary-, middle-, and high-school levels. According to Hannah, the objective of KCEP is for teachers to learn about Korean culture so that they can better respond to the unique educational needs and cultural inclinations of their Korean students:

Hannah: For example, in our culture, in Asian culture, when you are talking to an older person, especially a teacher, and when a teacher is reprimanding, you're not supposed to look at them; you're not supposed to look at a teacher who is reprimanding you because that is a sign of disrespect, so your head should be down. But in American culture, they'll say, 'Look at me when I'm talking to you,' right? And because of those cultural differences, there are problems. So the teacher will be mad and telling the parents that, 'Your child is being disrespectful because he's not looking at me when I talk to him.' So we teach a lot of things about cultural differences, and teachers learn that a student who looks down like that doesn't mean to be disrespectful in the classroom.

Right.

Hannah: Another example, we read a book on names and how names are very important in our culture. A lot of Korean kids have names that maybe their grandparents went to a special place paid a lot of money to get that name, and the name predicts the child's future, so it's just really a good name. But then a lot of kids come here and they'll either be made fun of because other kids can't pronounce it, or the teachers screw it up all the time because they can't pronounce it. Then these kids get embarrassed and so the family will change the kid's name to an American name. So we talk to the teachers about that. 'When you call a kid's name, be respectful. Try your best.'

So the purpose is to help teachers bridge cultural divides?

Hannah: Right. The purpose of the program is for teachers to learn it, take it to the classroom, and apply it.

Space is limited to 25 teachers per year, and only those who have never participated in the program are allowed to register. Teachers are paid \$300 for their attendance, and a lengthy waitlist indicates that the program is extremely popular. Hannah invited me to attend and participate in the program – an invitation that I was eager to accept.

The Korean Cultural Education Program (KCEP)

The 2015 iteration of KCEP is held in a middle-school theatre near the Valley View Civic Center. For the event, the theatre is decorated with posters and table displays along each wall. The posters and displays depict various aspects of Korean culture, such as food, clothing, musical instruments, literature, systems of government and education, and wildlife. A large

South Korean flag hangs above the stage at the front of the room. Five tables are spaced across the carpeted floor, and there is a packet of information on the table in front of each chair. This packet contains a daily schedule, a printout of the PowerPoint slides for each presenter's presentation, a list of famous people from South Korea, and a compilation of facts about South Korean history. Beside each packet is a stack of several books, touching on topics of Korean history, culture, immigration, education, and assimilation trajectories. Of the 25 teachers in attendance, 21 are White, 2 are Asian, and 2 are Latino.

The program begins with a buffet lunch at 11:30am, followed by a series of presentations and small group discussions from 12:00pm to 5:00pm. On the first day, the mayor of Valley View, who is Korean-American, makes a brief statement welcoming teachers to the program, and encouraging them to share all that they learn with faculty and staff at their respective schools. The mayor's warm welcome is followed by a presentation from a professor at a local university. He speaks about the values of Confucianism that are such an integral part of Korean culture. He contrasts Confucian values with American values, and challenges teachers to be mindful of these differences when dealing with Korean students in their classrooms. He urges teachers to encourage their Korean students to take risks, since Confucianism teaches deliberation and caution. After this presentation, which lasts about 45 minutes and includes a question and answer session at the end, teachers break into groups of 4 or 5 to read a famous Korean fable meant to instill the values of Confucianism in children. Teachers are tasked with drawing a picture that corresponds to the story and presenting their illustration to the entire group, highlighting the Confucian themes. Teachers then watch a 20-minute video on South Korean history. The video focuses on the South Korean economy, industry, and innovation.

The second day of KCEP focuses on Korean arts. The first presentation of the day is by another local professor who specializes in the history of Korean music and dance. He plays several traditional Korean instruments, and sings two songs that are important in Korean history. He then summons two young Korean women to the stage, and he plays a rhythm on a hand drum while the women perform a traditional and popular dance. After this performance, he invites teachers to join him on stage to play some of the instruments that he has brought, and to practice some dance steps with the two young women. The day ends with a 30-minute video on the most striking differences between South Korea and North Korea, and a brief history of South Korea's relationships with the other larger and more powerful countries in the Asia-Pacific region – China and Japan. The key point made in the video is that South Korea is an impressive nation that boasts numerous accomplishments, and this success is driven by a need to stand up to its larger, more powerful neighbors.

The third and final day of KCEP begins with a presentation from an ethnic studies professor. His talk is titled, "Korean Americans: Historical Experiences and Contemporary Realities for Educators," and he leaves ample time at the end of his remarks for teachers to ask questions about how to best connect with Korean students and their parents. His talk is followed by a visit from five mothers of Korean students in the VVUSD, each of whom takes a seat at a separate table with teachers. After brief introductions at each table, the teachers and parent discuss the experience of parenting and teaching Korean children in Valley View. Following these group discussions, the five mothers sit in a row of chairs at the front of the room. Each mother is asked to describe her experience raising children in Valley View, and then teachers are encouraged to ask questions. After this panel discussion, a group of 10 children join the conference. These youths are between the ages of 6 and 17, and they are all Korean-American

students in the VVUSD. Each table of teachers is joined by two children and group discussions ensue, followed by an opportunity for each child to share his or her experience with all teachers, and for teachers to ask questions from a panel of 10 students.

The event ends with a dinner at a local Korean restaurant owned by a member of the Valley View Korean Parents Organization (VVKPO). The teachers are hosted in a private room away from the other patrons. KPO parents mingle with teachers and Valley View Public School Foundation staff. A constant wave of waiters and waitresses bring a seemingly endless assortment of appetizers, entrées, and desserts for the guests. Near the end of the dinner, the president of the Valley View Korean Parents Organization asks the teachers to share their favorite part of KCEP, as well as something that they learned. Most teachers mentioned their newfound respect and admiration for Korean people, particularly those who come to America for increased opportunities. One teacher, a middle-aged blonde woman who teaches middle-school, spoke last, and comments are representative: “I am just so impressed with South Korea and its incredible people. This program really makes me want to visit Korea someday. Actually, it kinda makes me wish I were Korean!” Other teachers laugh and nod in agreement.

In sum, the Korean Cultural Education Program is a case of an immigrant, minority group marshaling considerable resources to educate local public school teachers in critical aspects of their history, culture, immigration patterns, and experiences in American society, especially in schools. The KCEP is an example of what I refer to as *two-sided assimilation* – a process of immigrant integration in which gatekeeping members of a host society acculturate in the direction of an immigrant group. Rather than strictly assimilating to the local school culture, South Korean immigrant families and school-based Korean organizations invest in the

assimilation of the local education community to their culture by formally instructing local teachers and officials on the best methods for educating their students.

It is also important to note, however, that KCEP, in attempting to portray Korean cultural values as exceptional and as a reason for academic success in America, cites evidence that is easily contradicted. For example, the emphasis on Confucianism as an explanation for the achievement of Korean immigrants ignores the often poor outcomes of Korean immigrants in Asia (Portes, Gomez, and Haller 2016). Moreover, in Spain, immigrants from China – a nation in which Confucianism is widely practiced – express the lowest educational aspirations and expectations of any second-generation immigrant group (Yiu 2013). KCEP is principally focused on portraying Korean culture as exceptional and responsible for academic achievement. Though it fails to provide a thorough account of the factors that lead to Korean immigrant success, the portrayal is convincing considering that Asian students in the VVUSD – many of whom are Korean-American – tend to outpace their non-Asian peers on several academic metrics.

“DON’T BE ALL ASIAN ABOUT IT”: THE RACIALIZATION OF ACHIEVEMENT, AND ASIAN STUDENTS AS THE MODEL MAJORITY

For Korean and Chinese parents in Valley View, all indications are that the vitality and utility of their co-ethnic social and cultural capital reaps benefits for their students. At Pinnacle, Asian American students – most of whom are the children of Chinese and Korean immigrants – are the *model majority*, hailed as the academic pacesetters. Though they represent 52-percent of the student body at Pinnacle, Asians make up roughly 70-percent of the Honors and AP classes, regardless of subject, and consistently attain the highest test scores and grade point averages

(GPA). Tables 1 through 4 present student GPA data for the 2014 fall semester, disaggregated by grade, race, and quartile.

Table 4.1
9th-Grade GPA by Racial Group and Quartile, Fall 2014

Race/Ethnicity	Total	0-1.99 GPA	2.0-2.99 GPA	3.0-3.99 GPA	4.0+ GPA
Black	24	37.5%	33.3%	25.0%	4.2%
Latino/Hispanic	68	23.5%	39.7%	32.4%	4.4%
White	265	15.8%	24.2%	48.7%	11.3%
Asian	387	8.3%	16.8%	58.4%	16.5%
AVE		13.3%	22.0%	51.5%	13.2%

Table 4.2
10th-Grade GPA by Racial Group and Quartile, Fall 2014

Race/Ethnicity	Total	0-1.99 GPA	2.0-2.99 GPA	3.0-3.99 GPA	4.0+ GPA
Black	18	33.3%	38.9%	27.8%	0.0%
Latino/Hispanic	55	32.7%	38.2%	27.3%	1.8%
White	243	13.2%	28.8%	51.0%	7.0%
Asian	334	6.9%	14.1%	61.4%	17.7%
AVE		12.2%	22.3%	53.7%	11.8%

Table 4.3
11th-Grade GPA by Racial Group and Quartile, Fall 2014

Race/Ethnicity	Total	0-1.99 GPA	2.0-2.99 GPA	3.0-3.99 GPA	4.0+ GPA
Black	14	7.1%	64.3%	28.6%	0.0%
Latino/Hispanic	67	10.4%	38.8%	47.8%	3.0%
White	263	8.4%	28.5%	53.2%	9.9%
Asian	345	2.6%	14.5%	58.6%	24.3%
AVE		5.7%	23.2%	54.9%	16.3%

Table 4.4
12th-Grade GPA by Racial Group and Quartile, Fall 2014

Race/Ethnicity	Total	0-1.99 GPA	2.0-2.99 GPA	3.0-3.99 GPA	4.0+ GPA
Black	17	5.9%	47.1%	41.2%	5.9%
Latino/Hispanic	34	2.9%	50.0%	44.1%	2.9%
White	246	3.7%	29.3%	54.9%	12.2%
Asian	364	2.7%	14.6%	52.7%	31.3%
AVE		3.2%	22.7%	52.8%	22.1%

As these data make clear, Asians students at Pinnacle outperform their non-Asian peers at every grade level and in each GPA quartile. However, the exceptional achievement of Asian students is most striking when we narrow our focus to the school’s highest achievers. Table 5 presents aggregate schoolwide data on the percentage of all students who achieved a GPA of 4.0 or higher during the fall 2014 semester.

**Table 4.5
GPA by Racial Group and Quartile, All Grades, Fall 2014**

Race/Ethnicity	4.0+ GPA
Black	2.7%
Latino/Hispanic	3.1%
White	10.1%
Asian	22.4%
AVE	15.8%

Across all grades, more than one-fifth Asian students maintained greater than a 4.0 GPA, while only one-tenth of White students could claim that achievement. Latino and Black students lagged well behind, at 3.1- and 2.7-percent, respectively. Asians are the academic pacesetters and “white is just alright” (Jimenez and Horowitz 2013).

At Pinnacle, there are various classroom rituals that highlight Asian’s academic exceptionalism in front of their peers. For example, it is common for students to earn special classroom privileges for their strong academic performance. During a unit on the Civil War, Ms. Harding arranges a Skype conversation with cadets at the United States Military Academy. She determines that the five students with the highest grade point averages in the class will each be able to ask a question during the Skype session. Furthermore, the students with the highest average score will ask the first question, the student with the second highest average will ask the second question, and so on. Though only thirteen of the twenty-eight students in the class are Asian, four of the five students with the highest grade point averages are Asian.

Then, later in the semester, Ms. Harding's students play a stock market game to learn about the New York Stock Exchange. During this game, six members of the class serve as brokers, and they sit facing the class at desks positioned in front of the whiteboard. The brokers are the center of attention during the game, and I notice that four of the six brokers are the same students who asked questions during the Skype session with West Point cadets. I ask Ms. Harding how the brokers were selected for this activity. She replies that all of the brokers volunteered for the job, but that they need to have strong math skills to manage the money, so they tend to be the top performers in the class. All members of the class know who the top performers are because these students earn extra privileges, such as asking questions during Skype sessions or holding highly influential positions during classroom activities. These ostensibly innocuous and meritorious classroom practices amount to a racial stratification of the class in which Asians, by virtue of their achievements, are above other groups.

According to Mr. Holt, an assistant principal at Pinnacle for nearly a decade, the Korean and Chinese students are to thank for the school's competitive national academic ranking, and for contributing to the studious classroom culture at Pinnacle. Mr. Holt explained,

They are what keeps our school rank high. They improve our test scores. If you are a teacher that wants order and you don't want to have to deal with problems, and you want the kids that come in and know their stuff, you want the Chinese and Korean kids. They will study probably hours and hours without ever raising a finger saying anything.

Pinnacle's teachers, like Ms. Tanaka – a Japanese American English teacher – concurred with its assistant principal, and even held higher expectations of their Asian American students.

Ms. Tanaka candidly admitted,

I don't necessarily look at my classroom and treat a kid differently because they are Asian, but I know that if I have an Asian student in my classroom that I can count on that student. That student will probably work hard and be engaged. I can rely on that kid, and the parents, more so than I can for other [racial] groups.

This racialization of achievement has become deeply embedded in Pinnacle’s institutional culture such that teachers have leveraged it as a pedagogical tool. For example, on the first day of school, Ms. Watson (a White, middle-aged AP U.S. History and Psychology teacher) distributed a few handouts to her Psychology class, which provide details about the class curriculum. In her class, twelve of the twenty students are Asian, six are White, and two are Latino. “Don’t be alarmed by all of the handouts,” she stated before adding, “It’s not like you need to read every word, okay? Relax. Don’t be all Asian about it.” Some students smiled, while others laughed quietly at these instructions, but none was offended by Ms. Watson’s casual racialized instruction. Furthermore, for these students, there was a tacit understanding of what it means “to be all Asian” about one’s study habits: enrolling in challenging classes, studying for hours on end, and achieving at least a 4.0 GPA.

The racialization of achievement at Pinnacle does not go unnoticed by students of other ethnoracial backgrounds, such as Caroline, an African American junior. Caroline is an exceptional student: she maintains a 4.1 GPA, has achieved nationally-competitive test scores, and is active in extracurricular activities such as sports, student government, and community service. Nevertheless, Caroline notices the stark difference in the advice that Pinnacle’s guidance counselors give to her and that which they give to her Asian American friends—even those with lower grades, less impressive test scores, and little involvement in school or their community. Caroline noticed that the school’s counselors have encouraged her Asian American friends to apply to the most prestigious colleges and universities in the nation. However, when Caroline mentions the same schools to her counselors, they steer her away from her “dream schools,” and encouraged her to apply to what she deemed her “safety schools”—colleges with far less competitive applicant pools.

These out-group biases manifested with not only the school's guidance counselors, but also with its teachers. As a freshman, Caroline tested into the Honors academic track for math. As she explained, "Most of the students in the class were Chinese, including the teacher. There were only a small handful of us that weren't Chinese." Caroline then added that the math teacher would take extra steps to make sure that the Chinese students understood the material, as she relayed,

The teacher would sometimes speak in Chinese so only the Chinese students could understand her. This would usually happen during exams, or when the Chinese kids were struggling. It's like she took it personal that they would struggle and she wanted to help them out. I felt really left out, and I know others did, too.

Within this classroom, the Chinese students—some of whom Caroline referred to as "average students at best"—excelled with the help of a math teacher who often spoke to them in Chinese.

CONCLUSION

In Valley View, the East-Asian immigrant population has increased markedly in recent decades, and all indications are that these newcomers are rapidly assimilating. Academic achievement is a strong indicator of assimilation (Telles 2010), and Asian students at Pinnacle frequently outperform their non-Asian peers. While classic assimilation theories conceptualize immigrants as inherently disadvantaged minority groups due to cultural differences and language barriers (Kao and Tienda 1995), this is not the case among hyper-selected immigrants in Valley View. Korean and Chinese families mobilize ethnic capital in the form of ethnically segregated parent organizations and workshops for teachers. Through the Korean Parents Organization and the Chinese Parents Organization, these parents are able portray their Asian culture as distinct and exceptional, and to be active, visible participants in local public schools.

These parent organizations are particularly noteworthy because they provide evidence of

the ways in which highly-resourced immigrant groups have institutionalized their ethnic capital by embedding ethnic resources in local public schools and professional development programs for teachers. To be sure, Korean and Chinese immigrant families in Valley View make use of ethnically segregated churches, which provide co-ethnic social capital, and ethnically segregated standardized test preparation services, to succeed and assimilate. But ethnic parent organizations allow Korean and Chinese parents to work directly with institutional actors in schools on behalf of their children, throwing into sharp relief the commitment that these school community members have to the educational attainment of their students, and to the continued success of the school. The institutionalization of ethnic capital increases parental involvement and boosts the academic achievement of their children.

The Korean Parent Organization serves both the school's Korean community and the Pinnacle High School community as a whole. The KPO benefits the Korean community in three primary ways. First, it supports new Korean immigrants by translating and relaying critical information from the Pinnacle Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and announcements. Softening the language barrier keeps Korean parents informed, and encourages them to participate in various school processes, such as the search for a new school principal. Second, the KPO supports Korean students who need extra assistance, such as providing a translator and "mediator" for the parents of a boy who was caught cheating, or helping a mother and her son draft a letter to school administrators after the boy was repeatedly caught smoking on campus. In both of these cases the offending student faced a harsh penalty at first, but each situation was resolved with little punishment and no lasting effect on the student's progress.

Third, the mere existence of these ethnic parent groups, in the absence of other ethnic parent groups, reifies "model minority" stereotypes about the relationship between Asian cultural

practices and values, and educational attainment. Model minority stereotypes about Asian academic success compare Asians favorably to Black and Latino students, which disadvantages those groups. Meanwhile, Asian students benefit from “stereotype promise,” which refers to “the promise of being viewed through the lens of a positive stereotype that leads one to perform in such a way that confirms the positive stereotype, thereby enhancing performance” (Lee 2012). Furthermore, these parent organizations cultivate a favorable reputation on campus for their ethnic group through tireless fundraising, lavish luncheons and gifts for teachers, and cash donations for school supplies.

The KPO also supports Pinnacle by inviting teachers to participate in the annual Korean Cultural Education Program (KCEP), a three-day conference in which local educators are paid \$300 to learn about Korean history, culture, and strategies for effective, culturally sensitive pedagogy with their Korean students. KCEP yields theoretical implications for the sociology of assimilation. Early assimilation theory adopted both a Euro- and immigrant-centric perspective, arguing that assimilation was an essential and straight-line, one-sided process of gradual incorporation of an immigrant group into the dominant society (Gordon 1964). Subsequently, seminal assimilation scholarship considered the experiences and trajectories of non-European immigrants, as well as the ways in which pre-migration statuses and post-migration contexts of reception color the assimilation process for all immigrants (Feliciano 2005; Portes and Stepick 1993; Portes and Zhou 1993).

Assimilation, however, is not a unidirectional process of immigrant incorporation and boundary dissolution; rather, when an immigrant group settles in a new society, members of that host society may necessarily acculturate in the direction of the new immigrant minority group. In the case of the Korean Parent Organization and the Korean Cultural Education Program, a

minority group of recent immigrant origin dictates the direction of assimilation by facilitating the acculturation of important members of the host society – their children’s teachers – to the history and customs of their ethnic group. The result is that both the Korean and local teaching communities assimilate toward one another, bridging the cultural divide from both sides. In Valley View, this two-sided process of assimilation is advantageous for both parties, and it is a striking example of the ways in which immigrants actively remake the institutional mainstream.

CHAPTER 5

COLLEGE–OR–BUST? TOWARD DESEGREGATED, DESTIGMATIZED EDUCATION

“The Valley View mold is that everyone goes to a 4-year college after high school because the schools here have the best teachers and the best education. But not every kid fits into that; not every student is a 4-year-college-bound-straight-out-of-high-school student. In that sense, Crossroads really represents a failure to educate all students in this district. We have failed to include these kids in comprehensive sites.”

–Dr. Owens, Crossroads Assistant Principal

“A lot of these kids just want to do something where they can see a finished product. They don’t respond to abstract concepts because they just aren’t interested. There’s a construction site down the street, and I would love to take some of these boys over there and hand them a shovel so they can feel a sense of ability and accomplishment.”

–Mr. Gregory, Crossroads Math and Science Teacher

Schools are sites of constant social interaction, places where individual and institutional cultures converge. In this study, I have investigated relationships between culture at the institutional and individual levels, and the ways that lead to unequal opportunities, outcomes, and experiences for students. In Valley View, a rigid institutional culture and framing of success leads to the segregation of students who have fallen behind academically, or to the preemptive segregation of students who have been deemed likely to fall behind in the near future. This is a system of

academic segregation, which occurs entirely independent of the forces of residential segregation that typically result in segregated schools.

In Valley View, these segregated students, who are disproportionately Black and Latino, are sent to Crossroads High School, a separate, unequal school in the same affluent school district. At Crossroads students are confronted with conspicuous police surveillance, prison-like bars and fences, and a curriculum that limits their post-secondary schooling options to community college or trade school. These conditions are markedly different from what students experience at the city's four mainstream high schools, and they represent a *criminalization of mediocrity*. This study also examines how ethnic capital is institutionalized in schools—boosting the reputation and achievements of those ethnic groups while fueling model minority stereotypes and implicit biases about why certain groups succeed over others. Together, these processes dictate which groups are most worthy of praise and recognition.

This work makes a unique contribution to sociology given the persistence of segregation in American schools – despite the Supreme Court declaring such arrangements to be unconstitutional over six decades ago – and the continued influx of immigration in American society. It is critical for social scientists to document the ways in which the social forces of segregation and immigration have changed over time, and the impact that they have on institutions and communities. In the following paragraphs, I summarize my key findings and offer a set of policy prescriptions, grounded in my data, that address academic segregation, the criminalization of mediocrity, and the institutionalization of ethnic capital.

A COLLEGE-OR-BUST-PARADIGM

Comprehensive high schools in Valley View espouse a college-or-bust approach; teachers and counselors constantly remind students of the standards necessary to be admitted to a four-year

college or university, and parents push their children to pursue a trajectory of classes and activities that will be attractive to these institutions. At Pinnacle High School, 96% of graduates enroll directly into a postsecondary institution, and nearly 70% of these graduates do so at a four-year school. As detailed in chapter 2, Pinnacle's academic culture is defined by an exacting institutional success frame in which success is measured by the number of honors and advanced placement courses that a student takes, whether one attains a 4.0 GPA or not, an SAT score in the 90th-percentile or better, and admission to a prestigious college. Though this creates a stressful environment, it also works well for the many students and families who are interested in performing at a level that matches the institutional success frame.

The institutional success frame does not align with the academic goals of all students; some are interested in college, but do not want to be in a highly competitive academic environment. Others are not sure if college is right for them, and they want to try community college first to test the postsecondary waters. Still others have no desire to enroll in a college or university, preferring instead to enter the workforce directly after high school or attend a technical school or trade school in pursuit of a specific job or career that does not require a college degree. The institutional success frame at Pinnacle, however, leaves little room for these students to feel welcome and supported. The frame pushes all students to pursue college enrollment, regardless of academic performance and interests. Those who would desire or would benefit from a different trajectory are marginalized, and those who struggle are at-risk for a transfer to Crossroads.

For students who are transferred to Crossroads, the Valley View Unified School District (VVUSD) college-or-bust paradigm largely remains, despite the fact that the limited Crossroads curriculum disqualifies graduates from enrolling in a four-year university regardless of how well

they perform academically. Furthermore, though a primary goal of the “alternative education” system in Valley View is for students to recover the requisite amount of credits to return to and graduate from their neighborhood public high school, few students transfer back, even among those who are eligible to return. In many ways, however, Crossroads students are still pushed toward college, as if college is the only viable path to a successful adult life. For example, one of Crossroads’s classrooms doubles as the counseling office and a space to host the “new student orientation” events that occur roughly once-a-month throughout the school year. Thus, this is a room in which students are often thinking about and planning their future in some way, either as a new Crossroads student or a student in need of guidance and counsel.

Three of the room’s four walls are covered in colorful pennants representing various four-year colleges and universities. The irony of this setup is that Crossroads graduates are ineligible to enroll in any of these schools immediately after high school. Moreover, since many Crossroads students have fallen short of earning passing grades in multiple classes at their comprehensive high school, a four-year college or university may not be the best option for them after high school regardless of which high school they graduate from. For those Crossroads students for whom a four-year college is a sound option, it is a long-term option since any Crossroads graduate with his or her sights set on enrolling in such a school would need to first attend a two-year community college before transferring to a four-year institution.

Operating under the premise that college enrollment should be the first and best option for all students after high school, regardless of students’ talents and interests, the Valley View Unified School District sets certain students up for failure. A prime example of this comes from the case of Miguel, the eleventh-grader at Crossroads whom we met in chapter 3. Despite a disinterest in core curriculum course, a strong interest in his culinary arts class, and a career goal

of becoming a restaurant chef, Miguel was pulled from his culinary arts class by the Crossroads principal as punishment for his being repeatedly late to first-period history class. Principal Johnson justified this action by stating that, “CTEP (career technical education program) is a privilege that is earned, so it can be taken away.” By framing culinary arts class – as well as other vocational classes offered by the school district – as an extracurricular privilege rather than a source of inspiration and motivation for students like Miguel, Crossroads misses opportunities to set struggling students on a steady path to a fulfilling career.

Crossroads teachers often questioned the logic behind framing high school as a step toward immediate college enrollment for all students. Mr. Gregory, who teaches math, expressed views that are representative: “I think it’s great that [school principal] wants them all to go to college, but I don’t many of them are ready for that, and I’m not sure that we’re adequately preparing the ones who are ready.” During this conversation with Mr. Gregory, I wonder aloud as to the incentive that Crossroads students have to come to school every day, particularly if they are not interested in college. “That’s a good question,” he replies. “I don’t think many of them could tell you.”

In contrast, my fieldwork at Pinnacle High School reveals that its students have clear goals for their future, and a belief that academic achievement in high school is essential to the pursuit and attainment of those future goals. Moreover, Pinnacle prepares students to succeed in college, so Pinnacle students work hard with the knowledge that their hard work will be rewarded with desirable college choices and the tools to succeed at the next level. Crossroads students, however, are frequently unsure of their plans and goals after high school. According to Mr. Gregory, this insecurity that Crossroads students feel about their future is amplified by the lack of preparation that Crossroads provides: “We’re giving a high school diploma that’s not

opening any doors for them [students]. The system is set up so that they can get just what they need to get through, but we need to focus on what's after that." Crossroads functions well as a credit recovery school where students can catch up on coursework and have a chance to graduate from high school on time, but little emphasis is placed on preparing students for life after high school.

Dozens of the Crossroads students whom I got to know during my fieldwork stated that they were unsure if college was right for them, and that they planned to seek full-time employment immediately after graduation. Some, like Amira, a 17-year-old senior whose parents emigrated to America from Iran when she was a toddler, had planned to attend college, but questioned that path once they were sent to Crossroads: "I really wanted to go to college when I was at [local comprehensive high school], but I lost that confidence and drive once I came to Crossroads." Many students, like Amira, arrive at Crossroads clinging to their college aspirations, but quickly lose the motivation to pursue that goal. These students suffer from a segregated environment that often extinguishes their "confidence and drive" to continue their education after high school, as well as a lack of college preparation from the curriculum.

During my fieldwork at Crossroads High School, I rarely witnessed students expressing intellectual curiosity in their classes; many were often listless and disinterested, and those who were motivated took a business-like approach to recovering credits by making a conscious effort to insulate themselves from the constant distractions coming from their classmates. However, one particular Crossroads event – the Crossroads Career Fair (CCF) – stands out as an exception. Every year during the spring semester, representatives and recruiters from the United States Armed Forces and local professional schools, academies, institutions, and other degree-granting institutions visit Crossroads for the popular event, which takes place in the large courtyard in the

center of the school campus. Crossroads teachers arrange large folding tables to form three sides of a square to accommodate dozens of representatives and recruiters from more than 20 institutions. Pamphlets, brochures, and informational packets are spread or stacked neatly on each table.

On the morning of the event, each student receives a packet with questions about their career goals, and a list of sample questions to ask representatives and recruiters at the event. The packet is meant to incentivize students' engagement and participation in light of the fact that many Crossroads students struggle to sustain an efficacious level of academic motivation. At the Career Fair, however, this step is hardly necessary. Students roam around the fair in small groups, asking questions, filling out their packets, and gather print materials from multiple tables. Armed Forces, cosmetology school, culinary school, and art institute are the most popular careers at the fair, and there is a constant crowd of a dozen or so students exploring each of these career options.

As I make my way through the bustling swarm of activity around the Armed Forces booths, I notice Coleman speaking with an Army recruiter. (We met Coleman in chapter 3, when he spoke candidly and insightfully about the ways in which, paradoxically, the academic and sociocultural context at Crossroads presents distractions for students who have been sent to the school to catch up on their coursework.) At the end of their conversation, Coleman and the recruiter exchange smiles and a handshake, and the recruiter hands him a business card and brochure. Coleman, carrying a small stack of brochures, makes his way to a picnic table with two of his friends, and I join the three boys. I ask Coleman to share his thoughts on the Career Fair, and he is as unequivocal in his praise for the event as he was in prior criticisms of the school's environment for struggling students:

Coleman: This is good. This is really good. You see how much participation there is? This is what gets us excited because we can see a clear path to a job or a dope [great] career.

Can you see the same sort of path in your classes?

Coleman: Hell no! Classes are just about survival, man. I think kids would try a lot harder at this school if they knew it was gonna lead directly to a job.

The Crossroads Career Fair is notable because it captures the attention and imagination of Crossroads students like no other class, event, or activity at the school. For students like Coleman, the fair lends meaning to education in a way that classes in the general curriculum simply cannot. Whereas Pinnacle students are generally able to focus in their classes because they understand that achieving good grades and test scores in high school will enable them to attend a desirable university after high school, most Crossroads students are not interested in enrolling in college. When we also consider that Crossroads curriculum precludes graduates from enrolling directly in a four-year college or university, the prospect of attending a trade school, technical school, or joining the Armed Forces is all the more enticing for students.

One of Crossroads's primary goals, as stated on the school's website, is for each student to, "Leave Crossroads High School with the capacity to pursue a field of expertise that encourages each student to be a contributing member of society." The annual CCF is an integral part of that goal. CCF demonstrates that many Crossroads students are passionate about certain job skills and fields that do not necessarily require a college degree. Nevertheless, attending trade school or finding full-time employment directly after high school are not respectable options in this affluent, suburban school district that boast some of the finest public high schools in the nation.

Given Crossroads students' frequent lack of interest in traditional curriculum classes and their enthusiastic participation in CCF, the Valley View Unified School District would be wise to

increase access to its Career Technical Education Program (CTEP) for Crossroads students. One potential way in which to achieve this would be to offer a variety of CTEP courses at Crossroads. Offering a wide variety of these classes, and making them available to students on Crossroads's campus, would achieve important improvements to the quality of education that Crossroads students receive, and to the overall perception of the school.

First, the quality of education would improve for students because their education would be more closely aligned with their interests and career goals. Pinnacle students succeed, in part, because they associate school achievement with college acceptance and enrollment. Crossroads students often, as Coleman put it, think of their classes in terms of "survival" rather than as an irreplaceable step along the path the college attendance. A more integral technical and vocation education program at Crossroads would add value to high school for students who are not interested in college, and instead prefer to acquire specific skills to prepare them for specific jobs. Judging by the excitement that Crossroads students exhibit each year during the career fair, expanding CTEP would increase students' interest in their education.

Second, expanding options and access to CTEP for Crossroad students would improve the public perception of Crossroads by repurposing the school as a place to recover credits and receive job skills training. In the current arrangement, Crossroads is stigmatized in Valley View as a school for students who are lazy and lack ambition in their education and future. With a more tightly integration vocational and technical training program onsite, Crossroads could reconstruct its image as a place for students with ambition to recover their credits, and, should they so desire, to receive job skills training for a career of their choice. Moreover, since CTEP classes are offered at all high schools, such that a student at Pinnacle who wants to take a culinary arts class might need to travel to another comprehensive high school after school to take

the course, expanding the CTEP offerings at Crossroads would necessitate that students from all local high schools spend time at Crossroads to fulfill their CTEP commitments. All Pinnacle students and teachers who expressed negative feelings about Crossroads had never been to the campus; their perceptions were grounded in exaggerations and stereotypes rather than experience. Rather than its current reputation as a school for failing students, Crossroads could be reframed as a school for students interested in pursuing vocational school or full-time employment directly after high school graduation, or who are simply interested in taking a CTEP course.

ELIMINATING ACADEMIC SEGREGATION

On a cool, cloudy autumn morning at Crossroads, I see Dr. Owens, the new assistant principal, as I leave a first-period class. She is sitting in a golf cart next to the administration building, surveying the courtyard and barking directives at students who are lagging behind on their way to their next class. “Class starts in 30 seconds! Let’s go!” Soon the courtyard is quiet and free of students, and I ask her about her transition to a new school and new school district, and her initial impressions of Crossroads. She had previously worked as an assistant high school principal in a neighboring school district, and she quickly realized that the academic culture in Valley View was unique. She says that she was last employed as an assistant principal at a large and predominantly White and Latino school in a neighboring district. At this school, Dr. Owens saw many students at her last job who were not as academically capable as the average Crossroads student, but those students remained at the comprehensive high school and graduated on time because, “those were our students, and we wanted them to graduate with us.” She says that the Valley View district is unique in its collective conception of academic success, and that the

students who are sent to Crossroads “don’t fit” in some way with the rigorous, demanding, and often stressful academic climate in Valley View’s high schools.

At the end of our conversation, Dr. Owens sums up her initial impressions of Crossroads and its place within the school district with the following statement: “*Crossroads represents a failure to educate. It represents a failure to educate all students in this district. We have failed to include these kids in comprehensive sites*” (emphasis mine). Importantly, in this blunt and candid assessment of Crossroads’s place in the school district, Dr. Owens references the fit between students and the academic culture in Valley View as being mismatched, rather than the academic ability of Crossroads students. The implication is that the VVUSD could do more to incorporate Crossroads students in comprehensive high schools instead of shepherding them to a separate, unequal, and punitive learning environment.

This opinion – that Crossroads students would be better served by increasing the support that they receive at comprehensive high schools – was widely shared among the Crossroads faculty. Ms. Turner frequently questioned the role of Crossroads within the district, and her views are representative of her colleagues’ opinions as well:

Shifting students off their comprehensive school site, psychologically, is very bad, because we are labeling them as failures; We’re sending them to a separate campus where kids feel bad about themselves. I just don’t understand why these students can’t be integrated at their home schools. The comprehensive high schools have more resources to support these students. They could get them involved in clubs and service in the community, and provide the academic support. But the comprehensive schools don’t want to deal with them, so they send them here. It’s segregation, it really is. And there’s a racial component to it when you compare the percentage of Black and Latino students here to the percentages and the comprehensive schools. Now I understand why people get so upset about segregation! The longer I work here, the more I think the system is screwy.

Parents of Crossroads students shared this sentiment. Greg, a parent whom I met at back-to-school-night, passionately questioned the institutional policies and practices that sent students

to Crossroads, the inequality between students at Crossroads and students at one of the four comprehensive high schools, and Crossroads's viability as a high school in Valley View:

I just think the model [of alternative education and continuation school] is kind of weird. It's taking a group of kids that are academically challenged, financially maybe disadvantaged, whatever the condition is, and putting them in an environment that's pretty bizarre for a school. It just doesn't seem like a friendly place. And the more I think about it, kids deserve better! I mean, they're in high school in Valley View; there's so much money here. They should build something nice with a field, something that looks like a high school instead of a prison.

There are two viable ways in which to redress the criminalizing practice of segregating struggling students to a separate and unequal high school. The first would be to remove the perimeter fence at Crossroads. The perimeter fence is, by all accounts, the school's most overtly criminalizing feature. Many students believed that removing the perimeter fence would improve the climate for students who were determined to work hard and recover their credits. Justin, a Latino senior who was on the verge of graduating, felt that, paradoxically, the fence was detrimental to the academic environment at Crossroads; by keeping all students at school, it enabled troublemaking, apathetic students to interfere with the progress of their peers:

If a kid doesn't want to be here, making them stay isn't helping anybody. [If there weren't a fence] I think way less students would end up being at school, but I think it would help the kids who actually want to be here to focus more because there would be less distractions from kids that don't want to be here.

Many teachers agreed with students on this issue. Thus, to an array of institutional actors at Crossroads, the fence is a punitive eyesore that makes students feel as though they are being punished, and burdens hardworking students by keeping their disinterested and unruly peers alongside them in the classroom. Removing this fence would be an expedient and simple way to remedy the prison-like atmosphere that students, teachers, and parents encounter at Crossroads.

A second and more comprehensive solution would be to keep credit deficient students at their comprehensive high schools by enrolling them in credit recovery courses there instead of

segregating them to Crossroads. The appropriate number of teachers could be hired from Crossroads to teach credit recovery classes at each comprehensive high school. Doing so would alleviate the embarrassing stigma that students feel when they are transferred to Crossroads. Furthermore, it would allow struggling students to remain on a campus free from the disruptions and distractions that are so frequent in a school populated solely with students who are behind on their coursework. Enrolling credit deficient students in credit recover courses at their comprehensive high school site would also maintain their access to the wealth of resources available to students at those mainstream high schools. For example, Crossroads students do not have access to a library, and there are not enough textbooks for Crossroads students to take them home – disadvantages that their peers at comprehensive sites do not have to contend with. With students remaining at their neighborhood high school for credit recovery, Crossroads could then be repurposed as a vocational and technical training site, where students from Valley View’s comprehensive high schools take Career Technical Education Program courses.

In many cases, Crossroads students had been well behaved and studious at their comprehensive high school, but had been unable to overcome a series of trying circumstances that resulted in a lack of sufficient course credits and a transfer to Crossroads. For these students, credit recovery courses at each comprehensive high school would be an especially welcome addition to the curriculum. Faith, a 17-year-old junior who was born in the Congo amidst a bloody civil war, provides a case in point. Her earliest memories are of the sounds of gunfire and bombs every night, and of taking shelter under her parents’ bed. After her father, a doctor, was killed, the family fled to a refugee camp in neighboring Rwanda when Faith. The family stayed in that refugee camp for 5 years, and school was not available to children there. Faith’s mother applied for an immigrant visa to bring the family to the United States, and they

eventually settled in Las Vegas when Faith was 12, and she enrolled in sixth grade – her first experience with formal schooling of any kind. At the age of 12, Faith could not “read, write, divide, add – anything.” She studied hard in and out of school, watching children’s movies and television shows to learn English faster, and taking summer school classes to accelerate her math skills.

After two years in Las Vegas, when Faith was set to begin 8th grade, her mother decided to enroll in community college in Valley View, and moved Faith and her four younger siblings there. High school was a struggle for Faith from the start. She had not had the time to learn and prepare in elementary school and middle school like so many of her peers, so she quickly fell behind on credits. In addition, her mother became verbally and physically abusive during this time, which caused Faith to miss five weeks of school. Her high school counselor suggested that she transfer to Crossroads and graduate early. Faith did not want to go to Crossroads; she had heard from other high school students that Crossroads was for “bad kids, fights, gangs, and drugs.” She had heard teachers threaten troublesome students by saying to them, “Keep this up, and we’re gonna send you to Crossroads.” But Faith knew she was way behind, and the chance to graduate early was a chance that she took.

Faith has been a stellar student at Crossroads. She recovered all her credits in one year, and graduated at the end of her junior year. She is now taking classes at a local community college with plans to transfer to a University of California campus after two years. Faith and many of her classmates are proof that the prevailing stereotype of Crossroads students as juvenile delinquents is erroneous. Thus, while academic segregation does concentrate in one school students who exhibit behavioral problems and lack academic engagement and motivation, it also displaces and penalizes students like Faith – students who are motivated, but have encountered

significant obstacles in their lives through no fault of their own. Creating a credit recovery program at each comprehensive high school would spare students like Faith the disadvantage of transferring to Crossroads. It would also help to ensure that academic segregation does not exacerbate and become academic apartheid.

THE PITFALLS OF AN EXACTING INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS FRAME

At Pinnacle high school, the college-or-bust paradigm is central to the *institutional success frame*. College enrollment is a firm expectation of Pinnacle graduates, many of whom enroll in the nation's most prestigious public and private universities. Thus, simply gaining admission to a college is not enough; one must be admitted to a prestigious post-secondary institution in order to meet the frame of academic success embraced by the school community at large. However, while the collective academic accomplishments of the Pinnacle student body are impressive, they often come at a price for students and parents.

During my fieldwork at Pinnacle High School, I met several parents who were pleased with the academic rigor and the ways in which the curriculum prepared students to be successful in college, but parents were also concerned that level of competition and stress at the school was taking an unhealthy toll on their child. Lily was one of these parents. Born in Taiwan, Lily moved to Los Angeles at the age of 17 because her parents wanted her to attend an American university. When she became pregnant after college, she and her husband moved to Valley View because of its reputation for good schools and a steadily growing Asian population. Lily's daughter, Emily, now a student at Stanford University, was a standout student at Pinnacle. Emily maintained a 4.3 GPA, was captain of the tennis team, played violin in the school orchestra and piano at a local conservatory, and was involved with various community service and church

activities. According to Lily, her daughter's schedule was so full that, on most weeknights, she did not *start* her homework until nearly 10pm:

Lily: Actually, in high school she doesn't study until after 10(PM).

Interviewer: So, she likes to stay up late?

Lily: No! She has no choice because if she has orchestra or tennis and then she won't be able to finish until probably 6(PM). And then she needs to come home and have dinner, ok? And I still remember that during those years after dinner she will have her own devotion time at home from probably 30 minutes when she reads her bible. And then she has to practice piano because she's in the conservatory. So, practice piano, at that level, probably 2 hours a day. And then she's playing violin, so sometimes she needs to practice violin. And she has piano private lessons, violin private lessons, and tennis private lessons. That's a whole lot of things! That takes a lot of time. And so she usually can't start her homework until 10 at night, and that's very unhealthy.

Lily and her husband spoke often to Emily about limiting her activities to reduce her stress and fatigue, but Emily resisted because she was excelling in her classes and her extracurricular activities, and she wanted to keep up with her friends. Thus, though Lily was pleased with her daughter's accomplishments, she was constantly worried about her mental and physical health:

Her group of friends were all taking those AP classes, too. It's the competition. I think the competition at Pinnacle is so stressful, and I can see that she's constantly sleep deprived. It's unhealthy! I don't like it. And I always had to tell her, 'You need to know how to relax.' But it's very hard. I think a lot of the kids at Pinnacle find it hard to rest because they have to have things to keep going and going, and that's a problem.

Hannah, president of the Korean Parents Association (KPA) and mother of two Pinnacle students, recognized this problem and was determined to address it with other KPA parents. She invited a developmental psychologist to make a presentation at one of the KPA meetings on the dangers of unhealthy stress and sleep deprivation in teenagers. However, when the presentation finished and the psychologist took a few questions from the audience, the Korean mothers "changed the subject" and asked about what they could do to help their children succeed

academically in order to gain acceptance to a prestigious university. At Pinnacle, the institutional success frame puts constant pressure on students to achieve at a higher level, and to increase their campus and community involvement so that they can present themselves as a strong applicant for elite colleges. Parents often drive this success frame and push their sons and daughters to achieve, but they are frequently conflicted by the unhealthy lifestyle required to reach this level of achievement.

The institutional success frame drives competition among students, many of whom are constantly striving to attain top marks on a course project, exam, or standardized test, and then compare results with their friends and classmates. This institutional culture is gospel for hundreds of Pinnacle students who have their sights set on gaining admission to an elite college after graduation, but the levels of stress and fatigue that many of these students are under is a concern that Pinnacle continues to struggle with. Moreover, the institutional success frame at Pinnacle marginalizes students who are average performers and those who struggle academically, such that those students often feel like fringe members of the school community. Pinnacle, and other high-performing schools with similar institutional definitions of success, would be wise to investigate and address these issues in depth, and, in so doing, seek to foster a culture of inclusive excellence in which the definition of success is broadened beyond a lofty grade point average, enviable test scores, and admission to an illustrious university.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ETHNIC CAPITAL AND THE REPRODUCTION OF ETHNORACIAL INEQUALITY

Valley View is a destination community for Korean and Chinese immigrants. In local high schools, Korean and Chinese parents have institutionalized their ethnic resources by establishing exclusively Korean and Chinese parent organizations (KPO and CPO, respectively). These

parent groups, which are present in schools through the VVUSD, are separate from the general parent teacher associations (PTA). The purpose of these segregated, ethnic parent organizations is to ease assimilation for new immigrant families; the KPO and CPO provide translators for parents who are not yet comfortable with English, relay important information from PTA meetings to members of the KPO and CPO, and provide information to parents regarding test preparation centers, community service activities, summer jobs and internships, and college admissions strategies and procedures that benefit their children. These groups further support Korean and Chinese students by assisting those who need additional help in school, or are facing disciplinary action. At Pinnacle, the KPO and CPO also support the school community by donating thousands of dollars in cash and supplies to the school every year, and by hosting extravagant “appreciation” luncheons for faculty and staff. For Korean and Chinese parents at Pinnacle and other local high schools, their ethnic capital has been institutionalized with the formation of these ethnically segregated parent organizations.

For these parent organizations, rather than merely seeking to assimilate to local customs and cultures, assimilation becomes a two-way process in which Korean and Chinese parents actively present their Asians cultures as unique and exceptional, and encouraging VVUSD teachers to learn more about those cultures. Each summer, the KPO and CPO host separate three-day conferences for teachers to educate them on aspects of Korean and Chinese culture that might help them better understand and connect with their Korean and Chinese students. Teachers are paid several hundred dollars for their attendance, and provided a buffet lunch during each session and a celebratory dinner at the end of the conference. The Korean and Chinese parent organizations are examples of the ways in which hyper-selected immigrants (Lee and Zhou 2015) use their ethnic resources to actively reshape the institutional mainstream.

This institutionalization of ethnic capital is advantageous for Korean and Chinese students and families, and both teachers and schools also benefit. There are consequences, however. Ethnically segregated parent groups reinforce stereotypes and implicit racial biases (Eberhardt et al. 2004) about which students are likely to succeed and fail. During my fieldwork, teachers made comments to me about how they were always confident that Asian students in their classes would be better prepared and well behaved than their non-Asian peers, and that they could count on those students' parents to provide the support at home needed to excel. Administrators credited Asian students and parents for establishing and maintaining Pinnacle's stellar academic reputation, while contrasting Black students as outsiders and frequent troublemakers.

At Pinnacle, the institutionalization of ethnic capital reveals and reproduces the ethnoracial inequality in the institution. In my conversations with teachers and members of the KPA, I asked them why the KPA and CPO were the only ethnic parent groups at the school. Responses to this inquiry were consistent, typically invoking the ways in which Asian "cultural values" led them to "care more about education" than other groups, or that "the Mexican and African-American parents could start a group if they wanted to." However, the absence of other ethnic parent groups is not evidence of a cultural deficit or apathy towards education; rather, it is confirmation of the disadvantages that those groups face, and of the assimilative utility of strong financial and co-ethnic resources for immigrant groups.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In examining school segregation and inequality in an affluent suburban community, this study reveals that many of the same processes of segregation and criminalization that have been so well documented in poor and working class urban neighborhood schools are also prevalent in the

affluent suburbs. Whereas schools in poor and working class inner-city neighborhoods tend to segregate and criminalize students in the name of security, high schools in Valley View subscribe to lofty, unforgiving definitions of academic ability and success to justify the implementation of these stratifying practices. However, some of the features of the Valley View community that add empirical strength to the study also present limitations.

A limitation of this study is that Valley View – an affluent suburb with nearly 50% ethnic minority residents – does not resemble many other cities in the United States, so I cannot generalize about whether the dynamics of education, immigration, race, and social class would operate differently in schools with a different demographic makeup. I am unable to assess the extent to which the institutional philosophies and practices that I uncover in Valley View’s public high schools may be particular to the ethnoracial composition of a given school and the socioeconomic condition of the surrounding community. Would the institutional success frame, and academic segregation, take on similar features at an elite public high school with a low percentage of Asian American students, or at a high school with a sizeable percentage of Asian students situated in a community less affluent than Valley View? Is the criminalization of academic mediocrity affected by the ethnoracial composition of a high school and the socioeconomic conditions of the surrounding community?

The themes in this study could also be extended to research on high education. For example, one might investigate the differences and similarities in institutional cultures and success frames between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and predominantly White institutions of similar national ranking and comparable graduation rates. Future studies stemming from this work might also consider variations in immigrants’ ethnic capital and the ways in which those resources are deployed on

behalf of students and their families. At the post-secondary level, one could compare the success frames held by first-generation college students to their co-ethnic peers who are second- third- or four-generation college students, and to other students of different ethnic backgrounds.

Finally, future studies could further examine the criminalization of mediocrity by revealing process of segregation and alternative education in other similar and dissimilar school districts. Are other districts segregate students who are behind in a similar fashion as is done in Valley View? To the extent that there are differences, what accounts for these differences? Moreover, how to the outcomes of students who graduate from Crossroads compare to students who graduate from comprehensive high schools with low grade point averages, or those who drop out of high school altogether? How do Crossroads results compare to those at continuation schools in other school districts or other parts of the country?

Taken together, future research could begin to disentangle the role of race from the role of social class in the formation of institutional cultures, and the ways in which those institutional cultures affect students of all backgrounds across the spectrum of academic achievement. The answers to these questions are critical as social scientists study educational inequality in an increasingly diverse America, and seek to create policies and practices that reduce the extent to which public schools reproduce inequality.

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