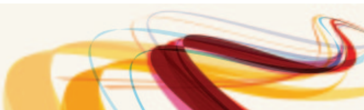

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Recognizing Dignity: Young Black Men Growing Up in an Era of Surveillance

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Abstract

An enduring finding is that marginalized young men of color aggressively seek "respect," or masculine status. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork at an all-boys public high school, the author found that respect—a desire to "be known"—offers an incomplete explanation for how young black men claim recognition in an era of surveillance. These findings reveal an alternative and more complex portrait of criminalized young black men in search of multiple *dignities*. With the help of adults, the young men in this study made claims to the right to grow as individuals. They also continued to yearn for a form of respect that rejected a sexually victimized identity, in a manner rarely captured in previous research. Their yearnings also highlight claims to a third form of dignity: to "be unknown," or the privilege of anonymity.

Keywords

dignity, recognition, surveillance, black male subjectivity, single-sex public education

How do marginalized young men of color claim recognition? The enduring answer in research is that they yearn above all for *respect*—the deference of others—and to "be known" (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003; Ferguson 2000; Morris 2012). These young men respond to race and class subordination by asserting masculine domination over others (Connell 2005). "Respect" highlights a portrait of a masculine identity that seeks power, rejects weakness, and is prepared to use violence. In this context, recognition is a matter of difference; lacking institutional forms of power, young men of color gain visibility—a reputation—in alternative status systems in which they can be competitive (Ferguson 2000; Wilkins 2008).

A heavy police presence and the logic of crime control are now mainstays in poor urban neighborhoods (Garland 2001). These forms of surveillance have had important repercussions for how youth maintain self-worth. When they are embarrassed and emasculated by authorities, young men of color invest more deeply in "hypermasculine" behavior marked by aggression and the mistreatment of women (Rios 2011). In a related strand of research, scholars have documented how excessive punishment erodes the moral authority of schools, which encourages transgressive behavior and acts of student resistance (Nolan 2011; Perry and Morris 2014). Yet "respect," which has long dominated the conceptual vocabulary of research on alternative status systems, offers an incomplete explanation for how marginalized young men seek recognition in this larger punitive context. As recent work has suggested, a more nuanced portrait emerges with an analysis of *dignity*.

In the context of punishment, dignity is generally taken to mean a sense of humanity distinct from status seeking, and the right to the presumption of innocence (Rios 2011). It is a matter of one's basic existence, a sentiment captured in Sennett and Cobb's (1972) observation that "no more urgent business in life can exist than establishing a sense of personal dignity" (p. 171). Dignity and respect are linked in important ways.[1] When institutions nurture dignity, young men are encouraged to disinvest from aggressively masculine behavior and status seeking (Reich 2010). When unjust forms of punishment deny them a sense of dignity, young black men gain recognition through resistance, by embracing their racial difference and by violating mainstream expectations.

In this article I address the need for an expanded understanding of the dignity claims of marginalized young men. The article's framework draws inductively on meanings of dignity in areas of sociological research in which the term has held a central place, including labor, citizenship, and human rights. This results in a tripartite model of three interrelated forms of dignity. The first and broadest meaning of the term is *social dignity*, a category that reflects that what

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counts as "worthy" varies over time and by context and is unevenly distributed within status hierarchies (Jacobson 2007). This definition resonates with a common definition of morality across sociological research (Hitlin and Vaisey 2010). I situate "respect" in this tradition. As related work on youth subcultures has shown, marginalized youth seek alternative forms of worthiness when they are shut out of the dominant award structure (Bettie 2014; MacLeod 1995; Wilkins 2008). When recent work in the youth criminalization literature has invoked dignity, this has resembled *inherent dignity*, or the basic humanity of all people irrespective of status or other differences (Berger 1970). A third meaning of dignity, *substantive dignity*, goes beyond basic rights to include worthiness that accrues from a sense of belonging in wider communities (Glenn 2011; Pugh 2009).[2] Across these accounts, dignity is a focal point of age narratives: of how institutions nurture or restrict the development of youth and how youth themselves envision their futures in the transition to adulthood (Fader 2013).

This article's empirical case is Perry High School, a unique all-male public school that served a low-income, black population. (All names in this article are pseudonyms.) Data for this study are drawn from 11 months of participant observation and 70 interviews at the school. Only a handful of single-sex public schools existed in the early 2000s, but that number has climbed to more than 100 nationwide (Klein et al. 2014). Some researchers contend that these unique arrangements empower young men by providing a space to interrogate racism and aim generally to steer young men away from incarceration (Terry et al. 2013). I situate Perry High within this larger context of schooling and surveillance. I characterize the school's efforts as acts of empathetic care rooted in social activism, which join a historical legacy within the African American community of mobilizing others to combat injustice (Collins 2000; McDonald 1997).

I draw on feminist theories of gender to explain how actors at Perry High make claims to *dignities* (Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2011). In examining a unique school ethnographically, I observed how a discourse of punishment refracted three major framings of black male subjectivity: as undeserving of care, as sexually victimized, and as paradoxically visible and invisible. In interpreting and contesting these subject positions, school community members made distinct claims to dignity. Although Perry High was making strides toward nurturing the inherent dignity of its young men, respect—or the desire to "be known"—remained important for the young men, but in ways rarely captured by previous research. Just as the young men began to feel a sense of racial pride and solidarity in the school, they were burdened by feelings of shame and fear bound up in the school's recent history. Moreover, primarily through conversations with older students who had had formal contact with the criminal justice system, a yearning for a third form of belonging emerged, which I call "being unknown." These findings reveal a more complex portrait of black male subjectivity that is missed in a singular focus on masculine status seeking, and more generally highlight how age inequality structures disadvantage for criminalized young men.

Three Forms of Dignity

Previous research on marginalized young men prioritizes the concept of respect. In what follows, I locate respect in a larger body of research bearing on a form of dignity called social dignity. I next identify two additional understandings of dignity: inherent dignity and substantive dignity. In explicating each form of dignity, I pay particular attention to how this concept bears on age inequality and on the criminalization of marginalized young men.

Social Dignity

Implemented in the 1980s, "tough-on-crime" policies led to expanded forms of surveillance in urban communities (Garland 2001). As Perry and Morris (2014) noted, these "policies prompted a prison boom of such proportions that incarceration, probation, and parole have become norms, rather than aberrations, for many segments of the U.S. population, especially young men of color" (p. 1068). The logic of crime control has infiltrated a number of community institutions (Brayne 2014). In schools, this has most clearly taken the form of "zero-tolerance" regulations that demand swift and harsh punishments for student offenses (Nolan 2011). In 2012, 20 percent of all black boys nationwide received an out-of-school suspension, which was more than three times the rate of punishment for white boys (Civil Rights Data Collection 2014).[3]

How do young men of color assert their self-worth? The prevailing answer in the literature draws on an understanding of the broadest form of dignity: *social dignity*. This refers generally to how the criteria for what is "worthy" varies by time and place, and can be given, earned, and lost (Jacobson 2007). It provides the template for saying that individuals engage, for example, in "dignified," "respectable," "honorable," or "decent" behavior. Social dignity converges with a dominant definition of morality in sociological research: the "temporal and social variation in the understandings of obligation, value, and worth" (Hitlin and Vaisey 2010:5).

Social dignity is "status dependent," which is rooted in an ancient notion of "social honor [that] belongs to the world of hierarchically ordered traditional societies" (Habermas 2010:472). Viewed in this light, social dignity resonates in a long line of sociological work that examines how groups protect power and privilege. Sociologists have intimated social dignity in research on how systems of classification—along lines of race, gender, class, and others—draw boundaries between worthy insiders and unworthy outsiders (Lamont and Molnár 2002). This has been a core insight for research on punishment. Drawing on social

reproduction theory (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), scholars have shown how institutions penalize youth who lack dominant, middle-class cultural capital (MacLeod 1995; Nolan 2011). In another line of research, a theory of disciplinary power holds that rational forms of punishment, such as constant monitoring, are used to control subjects in their everyday lives (Foucault 1977).

Drawing on these theoretical traditions, researchers have found that school officials perceive black boys to be more deserving of punishment than their peers. Young black men subsequently retain self-worth and "make a name for themselves" by embracing aggressive, heterosexual power (Ferguson 2000:125). This observation joins research on youth subcultures (see Bettie 2014; Wilkins 2008) that has relied on a central insight from Sennett and Cobb's (1972) classic text *The Hidden Injuries of Class*: that denied access to mainstream power, marginalized youth willfully break rules as acts of resistance, which create "badges of dignity that those in authority can't destroy" (p. 84).

This understanding of self-worth is coterminous with Anderson's (1999) analysis of a "code of a street," whereby young men of color yearn above all for respect, "loosely defined as being treated 'right' or being granted . . . the deference one deserves" (p. 33). In this context, young black men seek not only to "be known" or to have a reputation. They also seek solidarity with peers who resist unfair forms of authority. In these ways, recognition is expressed through difference. Criminalized young black men "make race difference visible . . . as an assertion of the 'we'" (Ferguson 2000:216).

Given that the body is an important resource for young men who lack institutional power, physical aggression is a key feature of the code of the street. Yet masculine respect can be gained in other ways. Young men, for example, repudiate a "fag" identity they associate with emasculation—often through the use of jokes—in order to solidify a heterosexual identity central to masculinity (Pascoe 2007). This process is racialized, however, given that institutions historically have punished black male sexuality. Pathologized "controlling images" of black men as hypersexual and as potential rapists have been used to justify their racial containment (Collins 2000). Yet low-income black youth may be especially inclined to reject nonheterosexual identities in order to gain status they otherwise lack (Froyum 2007). In this article, I show how young black men link sexuality to punishment through their joking. These practices resonate in the African American traditions of ritualized verbal sparring and black humor, which have historically served as critiques of inequality (Majors and Billson 1996; Morris 2012).

Inherent Dignity

Recent work on youth criminalization has implied a need for an expanded understanding of self-worth for marginalized young men. One influential account is Rios's (2011) ethnography of surveillance in Oakland. Rios (2011) found that criminalized young men of color were, "at a more basic level, striving for dignity," which "has to do more with a sense of humanity than a sense of power" (p. 39). Yet police officers demanded obedience and emasculated the young men (e.g., by being rough with them and embarrassing them in front of their girlfriends). The young men responded to police mistreatment by investing more deeply in the code of the street and "hypermasculine" behavior among their peers. Collins (2005) has argued that this police mistreatment—rendering young men prone and submissive—is part of a larger state-sanctioned sexual violence that includes the pervasive threat of rape inside prisons.

When scholars invoke a "sense of humanity" in this context, they are drawing on a second meaning of dignity: *inherent dignity*. This meaning of dignity refers to "an intrinsic humanity divested of all socially imposed rules or norms" (Berger 1970:342). Recognition is a matter of securing and protecting basic human rights; they are the "cornerstone of human dignity" and include "the rights to be free from murder, torture, or other cruel . . . punishment" (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005:1379). Although the hierarchical notion of social dignity is centuries old, inherent dignity has a shorter history and can be traced to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Habermas 2010).

Struggles for inherent dignity are fundamentally demands for justice. Extending Durkheim's ([1961] 2002) account of morality, scholars have argued that unjust and unfair forms of punishment erode the moral authority of institutions (Perry and Morris 2014). This meaning of dignity is similar to that in a longer research tradition on labor, which stresses protection from abuse and opportunities to grow and to take pride in one's development (Hodson 2001).[4] The denial of these basic rights of social citizenship highlights age as an axis of inequality and power (Gordon 2009). Although feminist research has examined how race, sexuality, gender, and other systems are "reciprocally constructing phenomena" that produce inequality (Collins 2015), age has been less emphasized. When they are punished severely and are unable to make mistakes like their peers, young black men are "adultified" and denied the presumption of childhood innocence (Ferguson 2000).

How can institutions nurture the inherent dignity of marginalized young men? Rios (2011) highlighted the vital need to offer young men the presumption of innocence and to allow youth to make mistakes without fear of punishment. In a similar vein, Reich (2010) observed that criminalized youth can come together and gain a deep awareness of their own collective powerlessness instead of asserting power over others. Recognition has a "degendering" quality: "respect, formerly something 'won' through competition with other young men, becomes something akin to mutual recognition, or love" (Reich 2010:36). Historically, black women have played a vital role as care providers for extended kin and as

activists in the struggle against social injustice (Collins 2000; McDonald 1997). This empathetic care grows out of the caregivers' own experiences of oppression. Researchers have increasingly examined how male mentoring for young men of color fosters "unity, trust, and open dialogue" (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Watson 2014:411; see also Hubbard and Datnow 2005; Valenzuela 1999). This study builds on this line of work by demonstrating how school officials offered recognition through provisions of care—those acts that benefit dependents, and those particularly disadvantaged—as a way of restoring the humanity of their students.

Substantive Dignity

Substantive dignity is a robust sense of worth that comes from a feeling of belonging in a wider community. The notion of substantive dignity resonates in research on citizenship (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008; Glenn 2011; Hughey 2012) and consumption (Pugh 2009; Sykes et al. 2015). Glenn (2011) called a form of citizenship that extends past formal rights to include a sense of belonging "substantive citizenship." I amend this term to invoke the sense of self-worth that accrues in this case.

Substantive dignity reverberates in Durkheim's ([1961] 2002) account of "moral individualism." As Cotterrell (2011) wrote, for Durkheim, justice itself "does not create the sense . . . of being *part of a larger whole*, a cohesive, unified, integrated society" (p. 8). Although respect offers "alternative subject positions as a means for becoming visible and gaining recognition" (Ferguson 2000:97), belonging in this third meaning of dignity stresses something different. With substantive dignity, recognition is a matter of similarity, which reflects "the goal of joining the circle rather than one of bettering it" Pugh (2009:7).[5] In Durkheimian terms, "individualism" is not autonomy from society, but autonomy through society. As Durkheim wrote, a secular religion binds people in modern society. An individual receives "dignity from a higher source, one which he shares with all men. If he has the right to this religious respect, it is because he has in him something of humanity" (Lukes 1969:23). Individuals seek connections to local and larger, often imagined, communities because anomie signals suffering (Marks 1974). In the transition to adulthood, marginalized young black men seek not only a sense of self-efficacy but affirmation from wider communities for their accomplishments (Fader 2013). Yet the barriers to membership are inflected with race and class meanings. "Narratives of belonging" reserve full citizenship status for whites and for those who embody a middle-class respectability (Hughey 2012).

Marginalized youth seek more than affirmation. An example from Glenn's (2011) analysis of citizenship is instructive. Glenn shared the story of David, who, as an undocumented Mexican young man, lacked formal standing as a student at a university (and therefore the right to an education). Yet David continued to take classes because his identity "rests on recognition from his professors and fellow students" (p. 13). In one respect, David's struggles highlight how citizenship structures the right to personal development. David wished to be recognized as someone with potential: as someone who could have success and a chance at achieving social mobility. Yet David also wished to be accepted. I would stress here that in seeking recognition as a student, David wished to be just like everyone else, a blending in with a larger (and imagined) community: a kind of invisibility. David's example highlights how the norm group (the college community) is unaware of its privilege as documented, and therefore of *its own invisibility*. As Ray and Rosow (2012) found, the raised visibility of young black men is tethered to the privilege of hyperinvisibility afforded to white men, who are less encumbered by forms of surveillance.

Social Prisms and Subjectivities

I draw on feminist theorizing to explain how actors make claims to dignity. An intersectional approach holds that multiple forms of stratification—such as race, gender, sexuality, and age—cross cut in the production of social inequality (Bettie 2014; McCall 2001; Wilkins 2008). These categories of difference interact at multiple levels, from the interactional to the structural. My analysis follows the lead of poststructural scholars who examine these interlocking categories at the level of discourses, or frameworks of knowledge that imply an unequal distribution of power (Weedon 1996). A poststructural framework is appropriate given that marginalized young black men frequently confront and resist discourses that frame them as "in crisis" and "endangered," which tend to pathologize their behaviors even as they highlight real disadvantages (Ferguson 2000; Young 2004). Punishment emerges as the dominant discourse in the present study. Its meanings were embedded in the life of the school: in regulations, conversations, announcements, assemblies, classroom lessons, and joking.

Discourses shape subjectivities, or how individuals understand themselves in relation to the world, bound up in powerful emotions (Weedon 1996). Feminist scholars have cautioned against analyses that view actors as "simply structural positions" who succumb to discursive constraints (Cho et al. 2013:807). In this article, people—the young men, with and without the aid of adults—expressed agency by interpreting and contesting the subject positions they were discursively "recruited to" (Choo and Ferree 2010). Spade and Valentine's (2008) metaphor of a kaleidoscope offers a helpful way of understanding this process of subject formation.[6] In my analysis, the kaleidoscope "turns" in three instances. In each case, a discourse of punishment refracted a different subject position of black masculinity, inflected with meanings of race, gender, sexuality, age, and other lines of difference (like how a kaleidoscope refracts complex patterns of light): as undeserving of care, as sexually victimized, and as paradoxically highly visible and invisible. School community

members interpreted and contested these subject positions through their claims to dignity.

Finally, struggles for dignity are deeply emotional experiences. Often, anger is the focus of young black men's emotional lives. In one common formulation, anger helps secure young men's masculine status (or respect). In another, black men risk being stigmatized as "angry black men" when they show too much emotion (Wilkins 2012). I view feelings not merely as "affect," but in a Durkheimian sense: as stressing the degree of connection to others (Collins 2004). Pride represents intact relationships with others and a self that has been verified (Scheff 1988). Shame is a sign of severed bonds and that one's basic humanity has been disputed. Many of the young men and school officials in this study were angry about the assaults on the young men's dignity. Pride and shame shift attention to the hopes, fears, and vulnerabilities that underlie that anger.

Setting

The Broader Context

Although private single-sex schools have long been common across the K–12 landscape, until recently their public counterparts have been quite rare. The 2002 No Child Left Behind Law and 2006 Department of Education guidelines made provisions for sex-separate schooling.[7] These guidelines support a larger public school reform effort that encourages expanded schooling options for families. In 2014, there were 106 entirely single-sex public schools in the United States (Klein et al. 2014).

Little qualitative research exists on these all-male public schools, and what does has largely examined why and how educators view these schools as an appropriate intervention for young men of color (Fergus and Noguera 2010). For example, educators can address young men's academic needs through the use of relevant cultural curricula. Or they can target young black men's social needs by cultivating positive notions of manhood through same-sex mentoring. Some research has located these schools more squarely in a context of mass incarceration and institutional discrimination. In this setting, schools are sites of racial empowerment and offer young men of color opportunities to debrief racism with black male faculty members (Terry et al. 2013). More recently, these schools have received support from the Obama administration's new My Brother's Keeper program, which is aimed at improving the life chances of boys of color (Albright 2014). For these reasons, all-male public education provides a compelling site for the study of dignity and punishment. I build on previous research by demonstrating how school officials provide care as a way of restoring young men's dignity.

Field Site

This study represents one of first ethnographic examinations of all-boys public schools (see also Fergus and Noguera 2010; Terry et al. 2013). Perry High School, the focus of this study, converted from coeducation to an all-boys model several years before I conducted my research there. The school enrolled approximately 450 young men in grades 7 through 12. The student body was 99 percent African American, and the school was labeled as "high poverty" by the district, with 89 percent of the students qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch. The student composition reflected entrenched racial and class segregation across the large city of Morgan. Like other large cities, the Morgan school district had adopted zero-tolerance policies. Perry High employed several full-time and part-time unarmed school police officers.

During the transition to an all-boys model, another coed school, Thompson High, became the neighborhood's all-girls school. This conversion, however, was done without adequate communication with community members. This made for a rocky transition that may not necessarily be representative of other efforts to open all-male schools. These missteps in implementation limit this study from making broader claims about all-boys public education per se. However, my primary aim is to "excavate layers of social meanings" behind dignity by attending to how "the messiness of history and historical processes, social acts, and social actors fit together to construct specific ways of being and becoming" (Best 2006:18). In other words, it is precisely the school's "messy" history—its first unsuccessful attempt at an all-boys model and how school officials regrouped; moments of pride and hope, shame and fear—that threw into sharp relief a multifaceted character of dignity that is rarely stressed in research on marginalized youth populations.

Analytic Strategy

I used qualitative methods to collect data for this study. I spent 11 months—the 2009–2010 academic year and the summer-school period—conducting participant observation at Perry High School. I spent an average of 25 hours per week at the school. I sat in on classes and hung out with the young men in the hallways, the lunchroom, and at after-school activities. At times I accompanied the young men when they were off school grounds, at events such as college fairs and at locations such as the city court. I took notes by hand during the day, which did not seem out of place in a school setting. I was happy to help whenever staff members and students asked for it (e.g., tutoring after school), which helped strengthen my presence in the school (Morris 2012).

I supplemented my observations with 70 interviews. I used purposive sampling to identify a range of youth and adult interview respondents. These interviews were semistructured, which included predetermined questions tailored to each group of respondents and allowed interviewees time to speak on topics of their own choosing (Berg 2009). Twenty-five of these interviews were with students, and they typically lasted 45 to 60 minutes. I got to know the students in class before approaching them for interviews, and a few

students came recommended to me by adults. This sample included young men who ranged in age 11 to 19 years, who represented all six grades in the school, and who had experienced formal punishment and contact with the criminal justice system. Eleven of the 25 young men (44 percent) self-reported having been suspended from school at least one time since elementary school. Six of the young men (24 percent) had been arrested once. I also interviewed 45 adults: 20 former and current teachers, 6 administrators, 9 support staff members (e.g., social workers and school police officers), 9 parents, and 1 school district official. These interviews with adults usually lasted 75 to 90 minutes. All of the interviews were transcribed in full. I used the software ATLAS.ti to code and analyze my field notes and interviews. In the first round of analysis, I coded for general themes, many of which were emic constructs common throughout the school (e.g., "manhood" and "respect"). In subsequent rounds of analysis, I used theoretical coding to identify and assess the forms of dignity that are presented in this article.

Following the lead of youth scholars, my chief objective was to treat the young men as individuals who could speak critically about their social worlds (Best 2007). In organizing the student interviews, I generally followed the approach taken by Young (2004) in his interviews with marginalized adult black men. I asked the young men to describe how their worlds (primarily the school, but also their peer networks, their local community, their family, and larger society) operate and to situate themselves within those worlds. I found that the young men were eager to share their thoughts on Perry High because of its uniqueness. The interviews with the school officials were aimed at their general thoughts on the school's past, present, and future; their own experiences at the school; and their perspectives on single-sex education more generally.

In relating to the young men, I largely avoided the "least-adult" role whereby a researcher "suspends all adult-like characteristics" in order to gain insider access (Mandell 1988:435). Still, I was aware that my social distance from the young men might prove to be a challenge and that the young men may have been distrusting of authority figures. I found that I was able to develop rapport by sharing my own experiences as a former urban public school teacher. This likely gave me some legitimacy and did not cast me as a complete outsider. I also found that I was able to build trust by encouraging the young men to speak about race and other sensitive topics (Bettie 2014).

"Time to Bloom": Claiming Inherent Dignity

In what follows, I examine how the students of Perry High asserted their humanity as young black men growing up in an era of surveillance. These assertions were couched in burgeoning care relationships between the students and school officials.

Deserving of Care

The importance of the coming school year weighed heavily on Mr. Bradley, Perry High's principal. As he and his staff members knew well, the first attempt at an all-boys model had been poorly executed. There had been little communication with staff members and families about the transition from a coed to a single-sex arrangement, and the staff had expressed dismay over the absence of an institutional mission and a clear rational for supporting their students. At a meeting to welcome his staff, Mr. Bradley, traded his normally jovial demeanor for a more serious tone. "We're a single-sex school," he started. "And we need to have a 'single-school culture.' Everyone has to be on the same page for this to work."

Despite the school's history of struggle, school staff members shared reasons for optimism. The school had received a large federal grant to start new programs including academic tutoring and mentoring. The school focused on building a stronger leadership, and with the aid of the school district was able to recruit a number of veteran administrators (some of whom were former principals themselves) to serve as assistants and mentors for Mr. Bradley. All told, six of the school's seven administrators were black men.

For school officials and other staff members, leading an all-boys school was an opportunity to live out their "calling" (to use Mr. Bradley's word) to help marginalized young men, and to alleviate strained relationships between black men and boys (hooks 2004). Take, for example, Mr. Youseff, a teacher and a devout Muslim. When I asked him to reflect on why he had been drawn to teaching in an all-male school, he described how he had been inspired during his days as a prison minister. There, he found his calling as an educator:

> I used to go up to the prison to talk to the prisoners—the inmates—and a lot of them are the fathers of some of the young men from this neighborhood. And almost to a man, they always ask . . . they always request of me in my other role as the Muslim leader. They say, "Brother Imam . . . make sure my seed"—meaning their sons—"don't end up in the same place."

Mr. Youseff was one of three men I interviewed who was currently active or had worked in prison ministry. He felt his life's work was "in the trenches" with the boys. He described experiencing a "moral awakening" as a child growing up in the civil rights era and how his empathy for boys grew out of his own experiences of racial marginalization. Other men in the school viewed themselves as social activists. One administrator found his calling to help young black men while a student at a historically black university. Another staff member had grown up in Morgan and made the switch to working inside schools after years as a respected police officer in the neighborhood. Mr. Bradley himself came from a family of public school educators, and he was determined to lead Perry into a more promising future.

Mr. Jeffries grew up in the neighborhood and was perhaps the most well respected staff member at Perry (and called by many an unofficial administrator). After being incarcerated himself as a young man, he returned to Morgan and became a tireless antidrug advocate. As Mr. Jeffries saw it, drugs had harmed community life and had created a "loveless generation" at a time when young men needed love the most. In his eyes, the school's new mission was both simple and challenging:

> When you get down to it, black boys receive less care than anyone. We need to show these boys we care for them. That doesn't mean being soft because the boys don't respect you if you don't have a backbone. It just means giving people what they need because they're human.

Racialized discourses refract a subject position of young men of color as deserving of punishment. As Mr. Jeffries implied, the flip side of this is a framing of young black men as undeserving of care. The new mission of the school, therefore, was grounded in the basic idea that young black men were deserving of care. If care represents those acts that benefit dependents, then these efforts highlight the crucial responsibility of the care providers, or the school officials. As Mr. Jeffries put it, "they are *our* children." At a training session for a new mentoring program, Mr. Jeffries stressed the responsibility the male mentors shouldered:

> [The mentees] need to try to see what it's like to walk in a successful man's shoes. But the hardest thing is for a man to walk a mile in their shoes. That's the thing: as a man, you can *act your age* by imagining what it's like to live the hard life of a black child.

Mr. Jeffries's message was that the mentors needed to develop a true sense of empathy and obligation. Together, this network of committed men would honor the legacy of African American community care practices. And although Mr. Jeffries's use of "age" in this context referenced the men's responsibility, it also highlighted how age inequality has historically disadvantaged black men and boys (Ferguson 2000). One moment during a later meeting of the mentors and students illuminated this idea. Raymond, a ninth grader, was asked about his vision for the program. School officials had asked Raymond for his help in recruiting other students to the program, as he was well liked by his classmates. On behalf of the other mentees, Raymond told the men in the room:

> We're still learning how to be men and we need your help. We learn lessons every day and after a few years we'll be more mature because of all the lessons we've learned. Eighth grade was only last year. Give us some time to bloom.

As Raymond implied, the young men deserved care as a matter of inherent dignity. Far from seeking masculine status, the young men yearned for the right to meet their human potential, and for opportunities to show that they were "getting somewhere in life" (Hodson 2001:44).

Providing Care

To recognize the humanity of their young men—so they could begin to bloom—the administration engaged in two strategies. They hoped that these strategies would build racial solidarity and trust (Lamont 2000). First, they encouraged the young men to examine discrimination, and particularly mass incarceration, in structural terms (Reich 2010; Terry et al. 2013). Officials frequently communicated to the young men that they needed to be protected from the common foe of the criminal justice system. This sentiment was captured prominently at a breakfast that brought together students and their fathers, grandfathers, and other male mentors. Mr. Bradley wanted to show the students his close relationship with his brother, so he invited him to speak. His brother told the young men, "My father didn't hug and kiss me. Because back in the day that's not what brothers did. But I'm here to tell you boys: 'We love you. We care about you.'" The speaker then turned to the mentors: "You don't need to go to Afghanistan. There's a war being waged in our own community! . . . Our young brothers are hurting one another. But our jails are hurting us the most!" The room erupted in applause. He later described his personal experiences of racial oppression as a show of solidarity with those in attendance.

A majority of the school's big messages (such as those given at assemblies) stressed how mass incarceration had made black men and boys invisible. These messages emphasized the depth of criminalization by asserting the breadth of dehumanization. For example, at one gathering Mr. Bradley declared,

> Prisons are now commercialized. Recently my financial adviser asked me if I wanted to invest in prisons and I said, "How, as an African American man, can I do that, when I'm trying to educate and not incarcerate young Black men?" That's how they view you. They want to make money off you!

The principal stressed that incarceration had "expanded to reach an industrial scale heretofore unknown in a democratic society" (Wacquant 2009:64). In a related example, Mr. Youseff was fond of encouraging the young men to consider how mass incarceration was exploitative, calling it a "human warehouse system" where "you will serve somebody's interest." Contemporary punishment was a system of racialized social control that mirrored slavery. Like other schools, officials also stressed an "achievement ideology" whereby success is a function of one's hard work (MacLeod 1995). Not surprisingly, then, many of the young men in this study took responsibility for their actions and failures. Yet, even if just slightly, school officials wanted to tip the scales by helping young men to sharpen their awareness of structural oppression.

For an all-male school, the beginning of Barack Obama's presidency marked a period of social transformation. On the date of President Obama's first State of the Union address, Mr. Gaines had his students read excerpts from the president's celebrated 2008 "A More Perfect Union" speech. Mr. Gaines asked his students what resonated most with them. Reggie pointed to passages in which Obama described "young men . . . languishing in our prisons" as a form of discrimination, and asked for "enforcing our civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system" ("Transcript of Obama Speech" 2008). "Obama's a real leader. He knows it's a big problem for the whole country," Reggie observed. "He's saying this is us needing to fight for our rights, like we're the new civil rights [generation]." The other boys cheered. Mr. Gaines beamed with pride. Reggie made a claim to inherent dignity and invoked a sense of solidarity with others far beyond the city of Morgan.

As the school officials saw it, the young men had been groomed to think that schools were designed to punish them. A second strategy in their caregiving efforts was to work to curb rates of punishment in the school. Mr. Gardner, a social worker, had for many years managed a substance abuse prevention program for youth. Like other men at Perry, he cited his larger commitments to "faith-based work" as motivating his work inside the school. Mr. Gardner expressed that one of his responsibilities was to help teachers not to mistake frustration for aggression in the boys. "I think that there is an intense fear for a lot of our young men here," he said. "And so any time that a student shows any level of frustration, that we automatically either just suspend them or write them up." As Mr. Gardner warned, staff members adultified the young men when they interpreted their emotional responses as personal threats (Ferguson 2000).

I asked Mr. Sharp, an assistant principal, to describe what could be improved about the school. He felt that many adults were too fearful of the young men:

> I think some of the teachers are really afraid of the boys. Even the school police are afraid of the boys. Because their mannerisms and being on the street, they have a tendency to be tough to people until they find out you're cool, or you are willing to teach them. See, to me, school should be a place where they can make mistakes, and a lot of the new teachers come with their middle-class values into school and they want to stick it on them.

For Mr. Sharp, a major challenge for the staff was earning the trust of young men who distrusted authorities. Yet the school officials' fear disguised the young men's desire to learn and grow. The administrator came from a class-privileged background, but he expressed having learned the dangers of trying to force "middle-class values" on poor black youth after three decades serving as a teacher and an administrator. He believed that his class privilege carried an obligation to helping poor young men (McDonald 1997). As part of a large, experienced administration, Mr. Sharp focused on working closely with a small group of teachers on their challenges with discipline and instruction.

To build a space where "proving" masculinity might go "into remission" (Reich 2010:216), the school officials articulated the important need to reflect on their own disciplinary practices. Mr. Harris, a school district official, emphasized the need to refrain from "acting macho" with the boys, which reinforced a masculine struggle to which the boys were accustomed. Mr. Richards, an assistant principal, told me that his biggest task was to "teach other men not to be hollerers. If you're assertive, you're seen as this scary black man fitting the stereotypes." The worry, he noted, was that students would distrust the men for abusing their power (Harding 2010). Care could begin to flourish at Perry if care providers themselves, to borrow Mr. Jeffries's phrase, "acted their age" by decoupling domination from personal strength (Reich 2010).

Being Known: Respect and Reputations

Although the school leadership looked to the future, the young men continued to be burdened by the school's history. In this section, I demonstrate how the young men continued to fight for a form of masculine respect linked to their collective claims to inherent dignity. This aggressive heterosexuality was intended to deny an abject sexually victimized status the young men associated with incarceration.

"The Gay School"

For many of the young men, the transition to a single-sex school had an enduring and troubling consequence. The school had taken on a disgraced identity as "the gay school." This carried sexual meanings that struck an emotional chord with the young men. They believed that their peers in the community believed that boys who attended Perry were gay. Tyrell, a 10th grader who had transferred to Perry in the past year, seemed to resent the school before he ever stepped foot inside it. He had heard "the school was full of all these gay boys. Like, you come here if you into gays, or you become gay if you stick around." In her ethnographic study, Froyum (2007) argued that low-income black youth strongly reject nonheterosexual practices and behaviors in order to claim status they otherwise lack. Froyum (2007) implied that the young people in her study viewed a gay identity as a form of victimization; they feared "going gay" and they "saw rape or stints in jail as avenues to homosexuality" (p. 612).

My findings build on this research linking incarceration and victimization. Perry High had long had a reputation as "like jail" in the community. It physically resembled one with its intimidating exterior and metal detectors, and the students perceived that outsiders stigmatized the school for being disorderly (Morris 2012). "It looks like an institution," Lamont, a 12th grader, told me. "I've been locked up. I know

what it looks like when you get locked up. There's gates on the windows, all boys in the schools." The transition to an all-male setting, which had cemented the school's resemblance to a prison, had provoked anxieties around a strict prison hierarchy. In addition to the threat of "going gay" (Froyum 2007), there was a second meaning behind "the gay school." Researchers note that a culture in which inmates sexually assault and prostitute more vulnerable men is typical inside prisons (Messerschmidt 2001). Young men learn about the threat of prison sexual from friends and family members who had been incarcerated (Sabo, Kupers, and London 2001). My interview with Keith, a 12th grader, is illustrative here. For an assignment in an English class, students were tasked with reflecting on a book they were reading, *Letters to a Young Brother: MANifest Your Destiny* by Hill Harper (2006). In the book, Harper, a black television actor, answers questions from young male readers seeking guidance on issues around growing up. One of the book's key topics—the qualities of a "good man"—led to a lively debate among the students. For a writing assignment, Keith chose to defend the position that acting tough was mere posturing for many boys and a way of hiding weakness. As he told me in class, he felt many of his classmates did not understand what being tough really meant. I asked Keith later about that in our interview.

> Some of the boys in this neighborhood think they're tough. They're not tough. My brother tells me, "Men get locked up and they learn real fast they're nothin'." They meet some real goons and soon they be someone's bitch. And no one can save you then.

This topic sometimes came up in school. One day, some friends were chatting about the recent episode of the television show *The Boondocks*. They enjoyed the show especially for its lead character, Huey, a politically conscious black teenager. Eddie brought up an episode in which one character, a black man named Tom, is arrested and is frightened that he will be sexually assaulted in jail. The boys discussed how often people make jokes about prison rape, before Eddie said, "real talk: that episode was *messed up*. That man was scared." His comment effectively ended conversation, suggesting that prison rape was an especially taboo topic.[8]

In the United States, the advent of a hyperaggressive prison masculinity coincided with a steep rise in incarceration rates during the 1980s (Miller 2006). With more street gang members incarcerated, prison culture itself came to adopt an organized gang structure. Therefore, as the criminal justice system has come to be identified with black masculinity, sexual domination has become a defining feature of the prison experience. The association of blackness with prisons has likely augmented public perceptions of prisons as sexually predatory institutions. And there is evidence of sexual assault in juvenile facilities: the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that in 2012, 10 percent of youth in these facilities reported at least one incident of sexual victimization (Beck et al. 2013). The threat of victimization is likely greater for juveniles sentenced to adult facilities, which compounds the already severe consequences for black male youth who are treated and punished as adults (Ferguson 2000).

The administration had made an effort to recognize the meaning behind the boys' street mannerisms, as Mr. Sharp described it earlier. Yet the young men continued to engage in a separate masculine status system intertwined with a discourse of punishment that refracted a subject position of black men as potentially sexually victimized. To perform appropriate masculinity and to earn respect, the young men frequently renounced sex between men and an emasculated fag identity. One day, a student stood near the doorway and "dry humped" students as they came to class. Jared walked right by him and said, "I think it's gay having all these boys here. We need some girls, not sword fights," which refers to sex between men. Joking, however, was the main currency for shoring up heterosexuality. In an eighth grade math class one day, a group of boys discussed their weekend plans. Kenny adopted a "fag act," in which he impersonated an effeminate identity in order to mock it (Pascoe 2007). In a high-pitched voice, he said, "Larry, I need new jeans that make my butt look good. Take me shopping!" Larry, who risked being emasculated, shot back, "All your butt's getting is a good workout in jail!"

In some cases, the students' joking rejected the school's own reputation. One day in the lunchroom, Doug surprised some friends and pretended to be a cop. He yelled, "What are you Perry boys up to?" The boys laughed and someone yelled, "We gettin' booked!" Xavier then shouted, "Officer, let me go! These Perry boys been in this school too long. Take them: they like being on their knees now!" If Perry High was known for being "the gay school," then Xavier knew to "be known" for rejecting a powerless identity linked to incarceration. The other boys howled and did not seem particularly offended, perhaps because—by joining in on the joke—they also benefited from the way Xavier denounced both meanings behind "the gay school": that boys turned gay at the school, and that they faced possible submission and emasculation once incarcerated.

The Seriousness of Jokes

Sexual hazing and antigay sentiments are present at elite, white-dominated all-boys schools, but their students' privileged identities—by race and class—help protect the young men's masculine identities (Stoudt 2006). For the young men of Perry, however, sexuality was linked to punishment and was therefore an especially tenuous identity, one that had to be actively defended at all costs. Their joking interactions are comprehensible when viewed in the serious context in which they emerged. Linking to the African American tradition of verbal sparring, the joking earned young men respect and

served as a veiled critique of the deep inequalities of punishment (Morris 2012). Historically black humor has been used to circumvent the threat of castigation that accompanied more direct and serious critiques of injustice. As Majors and Billson (1996) noted, these interactions allow blacks to engage "deadly serious issues" and "express deeper truths with impunity" (p. 63). Although the serious issue of prison sexual assault (recall Eddie's comments about *The Boondocks*) was only ever addressed obliquely through jokes, the threat of it appeared to produce a level of anxiety among the young men. As Keith shared earlier, a fag identity signaled emasculation and complete incapacitation, a permanent imprint of shame and cruelty ("no one can save you then"). In this way, the young men's struggles for respect among their peers implied a basic defense of their humanity.

School officials failed to see how the young men themselves expressed fears of incarceration, and there was little serious dialogue between adults and students on the topic of sexuality. These conversations may have enabled the young to talk productively about their feelings of fear and shame, which were so taboo that they were virtually unspeakable outside of the context of joking (Scheff 1988). Without these interventions, their struggles to be known spoke instead "of masculinity in a grammar of power" (Ferguson 2000:216), using language that suggested they could be victims of harm, and language that posed harm to others.[9]

Being Unknown: The Struggle for Anonymity

This section turns to older students who had had formal contact with the criminal justice system. After returning to school and envisioning where their adult lives could take them, they expressed a yearning for a third form of dignity I call "being unknown."

Visible and Invisible

"There's a slogan around my neighborhood," Brandon, a 12th grader, said. "You get it how you live." For Brandon, whose family struggled to support him financially, this meant hustling drugs in order to take care of himself. After several years as a "dope boy," he was caught with drugs in school and was assigned to a youth detention center. Back in Morgan, there were promising signs. He had developed good relationships with his reintegration officer and a teacher who was helping him develop his interest in audio engineering. For Brandon, who had never been away from Morgan, returning to his community began "a struggle for social belonging that is deeply patterned by human frailty" (Western et al. 2015:1540). The lure to return to hustling was strong, he said, in part because he knew he could earn back the respect he once had. But when I asked him about his future, he envisioned "aging out" of crime (Fader 2013). "Maybe with each passing day," he said, "the streets will be behind me."

"I thought," Brandon continued, "I was another nobody who leaves Morgan for prison." He had tried, in his own words, to "lay low" and "just follow orders" in the hopes that would expedite his release from the detention center. What he did not expect was to feel as much as he did his visibility as a young black man. He was told that the majority of the young men there were black and from Morgan. He quickly came to view the facility's population in those terms: the black kids from Morgan, the white kids from other counties. "A lot of the staff there were cool," Brandon noted, but the treatment was still racially discriminatory:

> If a kid from Morgan do something, the kid from Morgan will get punished more than a different kid [from a different county]. And because there'll be so much Morgan kids up there, the staff don't really have a sense of guilt. It's like, "It's a black kid, that's just how they are." I went up there thinking I was a nobody, but all they do is call us out for being black!

As Brandon implied, the staff did not feel a "sense of guilt" for punishing black boys more than their peers because they perceived that Morgan boys deserved it ("that's just how they are"). For Brandon, his time at the detention center threw into sharp relief a paradox: the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of black masculinity. On the one hand black men and boys are closely watched and seen in their neighborhoods, and on the other they are depicted as "missing" (Wolfers, Leonhardt, and Quealy 2015) or "invisible" in the public eye (Pettit 2012). Brandon was caught in a seemingly irreconcilable position. He felt that going into prison, he would be anonymous (in fact, he hoped laying low would accelerate his release), but he found that more than ever his blackness raised his visibility.

"Being Unknown"

Tre was a member of the school's first all-boys cohort. A burglary conviction kept him away from Perry for some time, but when he returned he enrolled in Second Chance, a program for overaged boys. Second Chance students took accelerated classes together and participated in special programs such as a class where the students discussed issues of masculinity and identity. Tre described being deeply invested in the street life when he was younger, and he knew it would always be an important part of himself. But he saw his future goals in a straightforward way: "Got to get my own job. Got to be able to provide for myself and my people. Got to get my own crib, pay my own bills." Tre's aspirations—those basic goals, not grandiose ideals—reflected "the good life" that provides autonomy and economic security for oneself and one's family (Young 2004). He wanted the chance to show that he "was making good" (Fader 2013:180) in his life. It was how Tre viewed a full sense of personhood moving for-

ward. Seven of the nine Second Chance students I interviewed shared similar longings for the good life.

Tre's yearnings became clearer following Mr. Bradley's visit to the Second Chance program one day. The young men had just hung up a banner with the program's new motto: "Success is the New Revenge." Mr. Bradley singled out Tre as one of "our leaders," and asked him what the motto meant to him. "People doubted us," Tre started. "Our success will prove them wrong." Ecstatic, Mr. Bradley asked Tre to share that message at an assembly. The principal felt this would raise the self-esteem of the Second Chance students and also support the administration's mission of cultivating stronger solidarity and male relationships in the school. In our interview later, I asked Tre what he thought of Mr. Bradley's proposal:

> **Tre:** They ask me to be a mentor, a leader, for [the younger students] . . . and that's fine, I get it. But for real, for real: I also don't want to be a leader for nobody. It just gives people more of a chance to slice me up, see me as bad. I don't trust that most people won't judge me as being bad.
>
> **Interviewer:** If you don't want to be a leader, then what do you want to be?
>
> **Tre:** I don't think it's even possible. I want to disappear . . . but not be ignored. You feel me? Do right by my people, but not make it like some big celebration. Just be like everyone else, go about my business.

Tre expressed frustration: in one way, he understood why he was being held up as a role model and even embraced to some degree the chance to be "a mentor, a leader." Yet he also wished not to be highly visible in any respect. Crucially, Tre did not want to "be ignored," or invisible in a negative sense before others. Like Brandon, Tre invoked a paradox of being visible and invisible, and struggled to find a measure of self-worth within it.

What Tre desired was a measure of substantive dignity: to lose his difference altogether, and for connection through similarity. I call this form of recognition *being unknown*: the privilege of anonymity in a wider community. Young men such as Tre attempt to reconcile their paradox of visibility—they are constantly monitored and labeled as the subject of a crisis—and invisibility by carving out a space in the middle, a privilege they believed others possessed. Tre still wished to be someone (to take care of his family and to do right by others) and to be able to come and go outside the gaze of others.

My data suggest that the assertions to be unknown were strongest among boys who had formal contact with the criminal justice system—a population similar to the "delinquent" boys in Rios's (2011) study—and who were older and were therefore thinking more carefully about their futures. The young men who as a group fit these criteria best were those in the Second Chance program.[10] Asad, a 12th grader, had a stronger academic record than Brandon and Tre, but a drug conviction kept Asad back in school. When he returned to Perry, he was placed in Second Chance. He was progressing well in the program and his teachers encouraged him to attend a college fair. There, he spoke excitedly about getting back on his feet. He envisioned starting out at community college and taking up a part-time job painting homes.

As a member of two communities—Second Chance and Perry High—that aimed to assist black boys, Asad had much to say about how he and others viewed his racial identity. Like Tre, Asad shared aspirations for the good life: "a nice home somewhere, a job to go to each morning, one that pays for all the things I got back at home." Yet he desired more. By way of introducing this, he described ongoing conversations he had with a teacher, Ms. Swanson. Asad and Ms. Swanson used the plot of the movie *The Sixth Sense* to discuss racial privilege. (In the film, the protagonist, Malcolm Crowe, played by Bruce Willis, is unaware that he has died and is a ghost.) Asad observed,

> [Crowe] don't know nobody can see him. But he thinks he's being seen, right? At the end, it's like, "Shit, I been wrong this whole time!" Trick ending, right? What a shock, right? But what he don't realize is that, not having people look your way, that's an advantage. Shit, that's some power right there! Being black mean I don't have that. If you're a black man: the police . . . people see you and think you've done something wrong. If they don't see you, they still think you've done something wrong. You lose both ways. What I want is for nobody to single me out and trust I'm not doing nothing wrong.

Asad articulated a form of "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1903). He understood his own identity as both visible and invisible before others. On the one hand, he was seen as a criminal. On the other, he was forgotten, and lumped with "missing" and "invisible" black men. Asad expressed a desire to be free of a paradox that deprived him of the presumption of innocence in two respects ("you lose both ways"). "Being unknown" is not a matter of status or standing apart from the crowd. Although social invisibility normally implies disadvantage, it can also be a racial privilege. The heightened visibility and pervasive invisibility of criminalized young black men, in fact, implied how young white men benefit from a "hyper level of invisibility" (Ray and Rosow 2012:67).

Discussion and Conclusions

"Respect" has long dominated the conceptual vocabulary in work on marginalized young black men. In this article, I build on the pressing need for a wider and sharper vocabulary of recognition in this area of research. I introduced a tripartite model of dignity drawn inductively from meanings of the term across sociological research. It is well established that marginalized young men are aggressively "in search of

respect" (Bourgois 2003). The findings in this study reveal an alternative portrait of criminalized young people in search of *dignities*.

Drawing on participant observation and interview data at a unique all-male public school, I demonstrated that students and officials made claims to the young men as children who had potential and were worthy of care. Growing up in an era of surveillance, young black men's fundamental dignity claims represent struggles for the right to personal development. I situated all-male education in recent schooling initiatives that strengthen caring relationships between adults and young men of color (Jackson et al. 2014), and a long history of black activism that provides care to fictive kin (Collins 2000; McDonald 1997). The young men were sharpening their political consciousness with the aid of adults, which were acts that "carried the seeds of redemption" (Rios 2011:163). From this perspective, educators are likely to remain committed to all-male education as a vehicle for racial empowerment (Terry et al. 2013).[11]

I next demonstrated how the young men's continued yearnings for respect link to inherent dignity, casting light on the dehumanizing extent of social control. Intensifying surveillance has likely deepened young men's involvement in hypermasculine behavior as a way of securing masculine status (Rios 2011). Yet I found that young men's status seeking, through their joking, turned on a specific fear of a prison identity that was doubly marginalized: an abject identity that signaled a complete loss of manhood in an environment already dislocated from mainstream society. The young men's rejection of this victimized identity calls attention to how today's criminal justice system constitutes state-sanctioned sexual violence against men of color. As Collins (2005) has written, "a prison-industrial complex that condones and that may even foster a male rape culture attaches a very effective form of disciplinary control to a social institution that itself is rapidly becoming a new site of slavery" (p. 234).

Finally, I argued that a third form of dignity, substantive dignity, captures a further yearning for self-worth among young men. In this instance, young men sought to reconcile a stigmatized framing as visible and invisible. They desired recognition not through difference, but a sense of connection through similarity. These sentiments appeared strongest—though were not exclusive—to those young men who had had formal contact with the criminal justice system and were older. I introduced the concept of "being unknown" to capture young men's desires for belonging in a community where the privilege of membership is anonymity (Ray and Rosow 2012). The findings here suggest that criminalized young men asserted a desire to move past struggles for respect, which defined their past, and to anchor their future selves in the good life. The young men in this study desired a modest form of recognition that comes with financially supporting themselves and their loved ones. But that alone does not encapsulate the yearning for a privilege of invisibility that accompanies substantive dignity. Previous researchers have stressed that marginalized individuals actively seek out visibility, such as when marginalized adults seek out "witnesses" who can attest to their struggles (Silva 2012). Or scholars have noted that one form of visibility mitigates another. "Honor," for example, is used to allay the effects of a discredited identity: "prestige symbols" divert attention away from stigma (Goffman 1963), and "positive credentialing" offsets "negative credentialing" (Rios 2011).

The young men's desires instead resembled those of low-wage workers who take pride in feeling "in the middle" (Sykes et al. 2015), and of children who wish not to improve the circle but to join it (Pugh 2009). In Durkheimian terms, these young men seek anonymity, not anomie (Marks 1974). In some regards, being anonymous can make one feel *more* a part of a larger group, not detached from it. The findings in this study reveal that the privilege to live a life outside the gaze of others is increasingly out of reach in an era of surveillance and has therefore intensified young black men's desire for that privilege as they envision their futures. To return once more to inherent dignity, although emerging research has focused on the important ways that young men of color fight for their rights, future work should also examine how desires for belonging encompass a struggle for privileges increasingly denied these young men in an age of surveillance (Ray and Rosow 2012).

Limitations and Future Considerations

This study has two main limitations that should inspire future research. Although I found evidence of a desire to be unknown primarily among the most criminalized young men in the study, this study was not primarily concerned with how claims for self-worth vary among distinct groups of young men. Other research has identified how different groups of young men of color ascribe to varied cultural repertoires (e.g., deviant or law abiding) (Rios 2011) or possess varied forms of cultural capital (Carter 2005). A second limitation of this study is that its design did not allow me to assess how dignity claims shape social outcomes. Supporting inherent dignity through provisions of care holds promise for improving young men's academic achievement and other social and cognitive outcomes. Caring relationships within schools are critical ingredients for the academic success of marginalized youth (Perry and Morris 2014; Valenzuela 1999).

Although this paper's typology does not exhaust all meanings of dignity, it could orient future research on marginalized youth and adult populations. This typology, for example, could contribute to work on young African American women and urban violence. These young women's claims may converge in some ways with those of young men, given the overlooked struggles for respect among black girls and the masculine street codes that govern their lives (Jones 2010). Yet their claims to inherent and substantive dignity would likely differ markedly given that those very street codes help reinforce gender-based violence against young women

(Miller 2008). Alternatively, aggressive forms of resistance and deviance may be foreign to youth groups in other cultural contexts, who instead seek acceptance and compromise in their fight for moral affirmation (see Hashemi 2015). More rigorous assessments of self-worth across a range of empirical cases should reveal more fine-grained and interrelated claims to dignity. They could expand knowledge of how marginalized youth leverage those claims to improve their lives and to secure opportunities to grow as individuals.

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Notes

1. See Pugh (2009:231fn8), Rios (2011:115), and especially Sennett (2003:52–58) for a more detailed typology of major variants of self-worth, including respect, honor, status, prestige, integrity, and dignity. "Honor" (a similar and even more esteemed version of respect) has been a focal point within urban ethnography (see Horowitz 1983).
2. A tradition of research on intersubjective recognition can be traced back to Mead (1934). However, given dignity's wide resonance, influential sociological work has leaned on definitions of dignity found in other disciplines. For example, Hodson (2001) borrowed from constitutional law (see Meyer and Parent 1992), and Pugh (2009) drew on Amartya Sen's (1999) understanding of dignity in the realm of welfare economics.
3. I primarily use *black* in this article as a term of racial identity, which refers to persons of African descent. Although the school district used *African American* (to include both U.S.-born and non-U.S.-born individuals), the overwhelming majority of those I interviewed and spoke with self-identified as black.
4. A long research tradition on labor has fused notions of social dignity and inherent dignity to examine how groups protect themselves from workplace abuse and struggle to be recognized on the job, which echo Marx's ([1844] 1978) claim that unequal workplace conditions dehumanize individuals and inhibit their creative capacities. Hodson (2001) also traced notions of dignity in the work of Durkheim. Given his focus on labor, however, Hodson restricted his discussion to Durkheim's (1984) concept of "occupational guilds" from *The Division of Labor in Society*. Durkheim's more explicit treatments of dignity and justice, however, can be found in his work on morality and education (Durkheim [1961] 2002) and individualism and political theory (Lukes 1969).
5. Pugh (2009) similarly located a sense of belonging in the "Durkheimian notion of the sacredness of communal feeling" (p. 231).
6. Spade and Valentine conceptualized gender, and not discourses, as a kaleidoscope.
7. To clear up confusion about the legality of single-sex programs, the Department of Education released additional guidelines in 2014. These, however, pertain to single-sex classes in otherwise coed schools and not directly to single-sex public schools.
8. A later episode reprised this topic. For a program intended to "scare" them into avoiding incarceration, a group of boys visit a prison and learn about the sexual abuse they would experience as prisoners.
9. These interactions created a harmful environment for non-straight-identifying young men. Adults rarely reprimanded the boys for using antigay language.
10. Nine of the 16 young men in Second Chance had been arrested.
11. For a critique of Terry et al. (2013) specifically, and of single-sex public education more generally, see Williams (2016).

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