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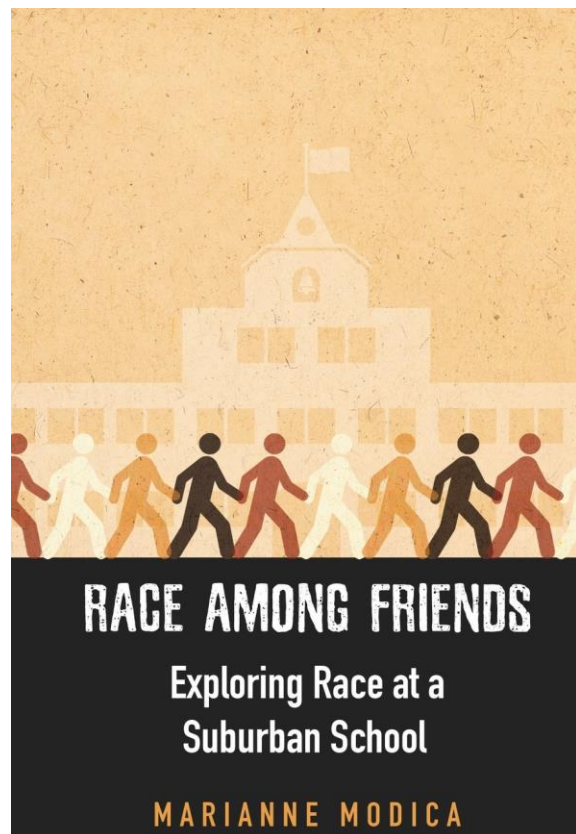
Modica, M. (2015). *Race Among Friends: Exploring Race at a Suburban School*. Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

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In 17th-century England, an Irish chemist Robert Boyle debated the existence of vacuum with noted philosopher Thomas Hobbes; the results included Boyle stressing the importance of scientific replication or reproducibility of findings (Shapin & Schaffer, 1985). In 1968, Professor Robert H. Bauernfeind specified this plea to educational scholars by noting replication is an essential given, “there is a higher probability that the findings of a single behavioral study might be in serious error, or might not be generalizable beyond the specific circumstances of the specific study” (p. 126). Beginning in early 2016, several news media outlets have deemed this a time of “replication crisis” (Naro, 2016). Makel & Plucker’s (2014) analysis of the complete publication histories of the top 100 education journals found that a pitiful 0.13% of articles were replication studies. Elizabeth Iorns, CEO of Science Exchange and guest on Last Week Tonight, explained the lack of replication studies results in “all these exploratory studies out there that are taken



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as fact, that this is a scientific fact that never actually has been confirmed” (“Scientific Studies, 2016). Reasons for said crisis include a lack of funding and little interest among scholarly journals, but Bauernfeind warned us of such issues back in 1968. However, certain issues in education have the power to continue to produce research, most notably, race in the suburban school.

To say Marianne Modica’s work *Race Among Friends* is a replication study is not entirely accurate. Reproducibility is not a requirement for high quality qualitative research, given its relative impossibility. Yet the process of revisiting and revising our understandings of phenomenon is part of the scientific method. As such, several notable case studies on the subject of race in America’s suburban schools have been produced. Amanda Lewis’ seminal work *Race in the Schoolyard* and her more recent work *Despite the Best Intentions* with co-author John Diamond immediately come to mind. Other works such as Signithia Fordham’s *Downed by Friendly Fire: Black Girls, White Girls, and Suburban Schooling* and R. L’Heureux Lewis-McCoy’s *Inequality in the Promised Land: Race, Resources, and Suburban Schooling* also grapple with similar subject matter. So while explorations of race in suburban schools are not new mediums of knowledge construction, Modica’s work does functions as a form of replication. This is not to say the work is limited to merely fact checking others. The work challenges and upholds various theories of race in school, while also providing unique insight on the intersection of race and friendships in secondary education suburban school settings.

Modica’s work explores Excellence Academy, a predominantly white, academically tracked, public charter school located in the Northeastern United States. The epicenter of her investigation was one English teacher’s 10th and 11th grade, honors and non-honors level, literature classes. These classes focused on multicultural literature including work such

as *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. In this setting, Modica focused on interactions between African American and white students given the prevalence of “boundaries and tensions” (p. 15) found between these groups and the limited population of other groups. While the specific context of her study varies slightly from her predecessors, Modica similarly found that race permeated student interactions in “profound but unexamined ways” (p. 4). Her focus on cross-racial friendships did not find spaces wherein honest and constructive conversations about race flourished as she had hoped. Instead, she argues these relationships “allowed the space for insensitive responses during class discussions, students’ silences, and racially biased administrative practices” (p. 4).

As the title clearly indicates, *Race Among Friends* focuses heavily on the relationships of cross-racial friendship. Chapter one outlines the ways in which race is performed by individuals and bounded by institutional and administrative decisions. Chapter two looks beneath the surface of de facto school motto “we all get along here” and unpacks issues of self segregation, marginalization, language, and the myth of the safe space. Chapters three and four explore how students’ cross racial friendships informed their understandings of two multicultural texts. The monograph finishes discussing and providing suggestions for what can be done to meaningfully address the influence of race in school.

A primary strength of Modica’s work is highlighting examples of how prior theories of the school racialized experience were different at Excellence Academy. For example, the notion of “acting white” at Excellence Academy did not concretely equate with academic achievement as scholars of cultural oppositional theory have previously argued (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu 1974, 1978, 1994). Instead, Modica found that acting white, while not

completely divorced from academic achievement, was more closely linked with membership in friendship groups and sources of cultural representation, i.e. language and music. When hard pressed, students did show tenuous links between whiteness and academic tracks; white students were overrepresented in honors level courses. Such findings fall in line with newer scholarship on this phenomenon (Lewis & Diamond, 2015) hinting at either shifting notions of acting white amongst youth or perhaps the lack of generalizability Bauernfeind (1968) warned against.

Additionally her work helps to push against prevailing notions about the power of curriculum to shape young minds. The notion that great works of writing are essentially, as Robert Maynard Hutchins (1970) argued, “teacher proof” (para. 39) and could inspire the greatest change in the most resistant student, proves to be lofty over romanticization. Instead, we see how the action and inaction of the well-intentioned teacher, Joann, works to shape learning about race. Joann values multicultural literature, discussions about race with her students, and a commitment to social justice, “while claiming a colorblind approach to race” (p. 3). This complicated stance highlights the ways in which mere exposure to multicultural texts has little affect at leading to anti-racist understandings. Such an unsteady hand in the classroom turned the poetry of Langston Hughes into a form of uncritical multiculturalism. Yet there is hope.

Teachers interested in infusing multiculturalism/issues of race into their curriculum can preview some of the possible areas of tension. I myself would have benefitted from such insight before using McIntosh in my own junior level history courses! Furthermore, teachers can receive guidance from Modica about effective implementation. I appreciated her discussion of the pitfalls of forcing students to quickly and publicly discuss controversial issues.

Modica provides specific strategies to understand and address such issues. Such strategies are well-suited accompaniments in helping students access and makes sense of any of the so-called great works of multicultural literature.

Academics in various fields of education will find *Race Among Friends* useful. The issue of tracking figures fairly prominently throughout the text as an institutional force which influences social interaction and perception while functioning as a gatekeeper for opportunity. The specific revelations would not be new to those familiar with the field. However, the specific ways in which tracking interacts with friendship is novel. Scholars of educational leadership or administrators in the field will benefit greatly from Modica’s discussion of how administration at Excellence Academy conflated race, social class and emotional maturity when discussion controversial topics. Several passages would prove intriguing case studies for administrative credential candidates to unpack.

Scholars of child development will find the continued discussion of cross-racial friendships throughout the text intriguing if not sobering. Research on cross-racial friendships amongst youth is not new and scholarship exists on the potential benefits of such relationships (Munniksma & Juvonen 2012; Tavares 2011; White et al. 2009). However, the particulars of how these cross-racial friendships influenced discussions of race and were influenced by institutional factors makes Modica’s work more than worthy of careful examination.

It is not the goal of qualitative studies to be replicable. However, Carl Sagan reminded us in *Cosmos*, in science, “there are no sacred truths.” The process of refining and deepening our understandings of race is an ongoing challenge in the United States. *Race Among Friends* does what just plain good science should do. It focuses on a narrow aspect of reality, which needs further understanding and works to understand it.

On the way to those understandings, the work goes through the much needed process of examining and clarifying existing theory. We now know more about cross-racial


friendships as a result of Modica's work. However, we also have refined understandings of issues ranging from colorblindness to marginalization.

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About the Reviewer


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