

WOZOLEK, BONI-JANE L., Ph.D., August 2015

TEACHING, LEARNING AND
CURRICULUM STUDIES

THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE: THE NEGOTIATION OF SPACE AND PLACE
FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SUBURBAN HIGH
SCHOOL (276 pp.)

Co-Directors of Dissertation: Walter S. Gershon, Ph.D.
 James G. Henderson, Ph.D.

This study explored how normalized structures and interactions impact marginalized high school students' negotiations of physical places and sociocultural spaces in school. This study includes the voices of 29 students, 2 parents, 4 teachers, the school resource officer, a cafeteria worker, a boys' basketball coach, and 4 building principals.

The study of how students of color negotiated the spaces and places of normalized racist ideas and ideals in this particular Midwestern high school was done through a sonic ethnography. The purpose of this non-traditional ethnographic process was to attend to the ethics of participant voices, shared experiences, and agency that is central to this study.

Conclusions from this dissertation include several resonant points to the study of high school education, race, gender, and sexual orientation. First, the performances of self that the students of color implemented in order to participate in the underlife of the institution as well as the broader school culture were, on one hand, layers of protection against the culture in which they worked to participate. On the other, such performances functioned to both constrain and enable students of color in their everyday experiences in

school. In addition, this dissertation concludes that the curricula—formal, hidden, enacted, and null—functioned as a mechanism to suffocate the ways of being and knowing of students of color. Finally, this study explores the intersection of gender with race, discussing how marginalization for girls of color functioned in separate and yet imbricated ways to the experiences of their male counterparts.