



Downed by Friendly Fire: Black Girls, White Girls, and Suburban Schooling

Signithia Fordham

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Most Americans would never willingly revisit their high school experiences; the nation's school systems reflect the broader society's hierarchical emphasis on race, class, and gender. While schools purport to provide equal opportunities for all students, this rarely happens in actuality—particularly for girls.

In *Downed by Friendly Fire*, Signithia Fordham unmask and examines female-centered bullying in schools, arguing that it is essential to unmask female aggression, bullying, and competition, all of which directly relate to the structural violence embedded in the racialized and gendered social order. For two and a half years, Fordham conducted field research at “Underground Railroad High School,” a suburban high school in upstate New York. Through a series of composite student profiles, she examines the girls' relationships to academic achievement, social competition, and aggression toward one another. Fordham argues that girls academically “compete to lose,” which only perpetuates their subordination through the misrecognition of their own competitive behaviors. She goes further to expand the meaning of violence to include what is seen as normal, including suffering, humiliation, and social and economic abuse.

Using the concept “symbolic violence,” Fordham theorizes the psychological and social damage suffered especially by black girls in schools. The five narratives in *Downed by Friendly Fire* ultimately highlight the pain and suffering this violence produces as well as the ways in which it promotes inequality, exclusion, and marginalization among girls.

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