Deconstructing College-Readiness in an Urban Black Context:

*Ideology, Discourse, and Practices*

BY

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THESIS

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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>American College Testing – ACT exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Advanced Placement</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>Chicago Public Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMRI</td>
<td>Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>RIAS</td>
<td>Racial Identity Attitude Scale</td>
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<td>SBI</td>
<td>Social and Behavioral Intervention</td>
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SUMMARY

This dissertation analyzes the academic socialization and identity development processes with respect to college-readiness in an urban charter school, paying particular attention to the ideologies, discourses, and practices at work in the school as well as the experiences and academic identities of students in an Advanced Placement English Language Arts classroom. Using critical ethnography and critical discourse analysis, I examine dominant ideologies and discourses that gave rise to academic socialization practices at Riverside College Preparatory Academy, as well how the choice and implementation of these practices reflects deficit-oriented constructions of Black students, their families, and their communities. I refer to the amalgam of these discourses, ideologies, and practices as the institutional construction of identity with respect to student identities at Riverside. School leaders and administration at Riverside serve as proxies for the institution. My analysis focuses on several levels at Riverside: the institutional level, the departmental level, the classroom level, and the student level. My analysis at the institutional level is primarily focused on Riverside’s guiding ideologies and discourses, as well as school-wide practices and policies. At the departmental level, the primary areas of focus for analysis are department-wide practices and teacher beliefs. At the classroom and student levels, I focus on students’ negotiations of practices. Using cross-case analysis, I examine broad trends of students in the classroom and illustrate the complexity of identities in light of institutional constructions of identity. Further, I dissect the experiences of two students using a case study method to examine how institutional constructions of identity are negotiated, contested, and appropriated with respect to classroom experience.
SUMMARY (continued)

The results reveal that two major ideological orientations—missionary and deficit—dominated the institutional level. The missionary and deficit ideologies were reflected in the discourses about Black students from administration and teachers. Both discourses and ideologies gave rise to practices of remediation at the institutional level and practices of negotiation at the departmental, classroom, and student levels.

The broader practices, discourses, and ideologies at Riverside served to discursively construct racialized academic identities, what I refer to as institutional construction of identity, concluding that students (1) lacked resilience, (2) lacked responsibility, and (3) lacked knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors. As such, socialization practices and policies privileged these constructed identities.

Contrary to this institutional construction of identity, my cross-case analysis reveals that students exhibited resilience and knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors, indicating a misalignment between academic socialization practices at Riverside and the needs of students. Student responses reveal that students both appropriated and resisted college-readiness discourses and ideologies at Riverside. Student responses also indicate that the students appropriated the college-readiness discourse at Riverside, but that going to college had already been an education priority for many students before they entered high school—in fact, that priority had guided many students to this school in particular. Another key finding is that some students were inconsistent with task completion, which led to practices of negotiation at the classroom and student levels.
SUMMARY (continued)

My case study analysis expands upon the ways that two students negotiated the “responsibility” identity in the classroom and in the school, as well as how the academic socialization practices at Riverside may have constrained opportunities for academic growth and future success.

This dissertation contributes to our collective understanding of student experience and academic identity at the intersection of individual agency, ideology, and schooling processes. While much of the education reform debate focuses on what it means to prepare students for college, Riverside’s college-readiness theory and practice were fraught with problematic assumptions about Black students with respect to their academic capacities, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences. Such assumptions frame how academic practices and assumptions are negotiated by students, which in some instances constrains opportunities for academic growth and future success. As cultural institutions, schools can operate as sorting mechanisms that reify class dominance, and they can operate as transformative spaces that propel students toward future success. As such, it is essential to reflect on and critique how educators conceptualize students and their learning in order to cultivate effective learning environments.
CHAPTER 1
THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

“We are at Riverside because we are different from other city kids. We want to go to college.”

- Ebony Smith, student at Riverside College Prep

In 2010, I arrived at Riverside College Preparatory Academy, a charter school in a large urban school system hereafter referred to as Riverside College Prep or Riverside, to conduct my dissertation research. After passing out my consent forms, I explained my research agenda to the students in Jason Thompkins’s Advanced Placement [AP] English class. I told them that I was interested in the experiences of African American high school students, specifically those in the city, and their attitudes toward schooling. The opening quotation of this chapter was the response I received from one student at that moment; throughout the year, many others echoed the same type of sentiment. Attending Riverside signified to the students that they were special. They were there to make something of themselves; they may have had aspirations and goals that were markedly different from their peers. Students at Riverside felt grateful.

When I first walked through the halls of Riverside, I was struck by the brightness of the building, and the silence. That first day, absent were the hallway noises and the long line of students waiting to go through the metal detector. Absent were the security guards policing behavior around every corner. The halls were filled with signs of potential futures; the banners of various colleges and universities hung from the ceilings and covered the walls. It was made clear that Riverside was a college prep institution. As a former high school

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1 All names and locations have been changed to ensure the participants’ anonymity.
teacher, I noticed that students at Riverside readily and enthusiastically talked about their futures and their professional goals. Many of my previous students didn’t take the ACT, let alone have college aspirations. So my initial reaction to Riverside was that “things are as they should be.” For students like Ebony Smith, things at Riverside were better than the alternative of their neighborhood high school. But the question that nagged me then, and that continues to do so, is: Why are Black students made to feel different, grateful, and lucky because they have the same aspirations as those of their white, middle-class peers? As a teacher, I believe equitable opportunities are a right, not a privilege. As an extension of that belief, in modern society, post-secondary schooling should be a stable and unyielding aspiration of all children and, by extension, an expectation on behalf of their teachers and schools. As such full participation should not be an anomaly, but rather the right of every citizen. College-readiness is constituted as the new catch phrase within a neo-conservative political agenda that informs educational policies and accountability structures. College-readiness is utilized as a tool for privatization of education in the current wave of educational reform. This new narrative is many ways is also complicit in a larger system of economic and political oppression. As I reflect on how college readiness as an idea operates in this current system of educational reform, and what college-readiness may mean for gaining access and opportunity within the system, I also understand the contradictory nature of what college readiness has come to mean. While I believe that providing students with access to college is important and necessary, there is also the reality of how conceptualizations of rigor, accountability, and choice have played out in school systems which, in many cases, have deleteriously and disproportionately affected poor students of color. Consequently, there are some contradictory tensions that arise for me in this work: I
believe access to college is important in paving the way for full economic participation, but it is within a flawed system that maintains and reifies racial and economic privilege—as a system that has very specific definitions of what college-readiness means. Thus, while this work critiques the ways in which college-readiness is practiced in one high school, the broader implications and conceptualization of “college-readiness”, while problematized, is not the focus of analysis. This dissertation examines how academic socialization practices do not prepare Riverside students for college as defined by traditional notions of “college-readiness” such as adherence to standards, accountability, and rigor. This is not to say that these terms are not problematic, but that given that this is a reality of how students are held accountable, this work examines the obstacles to these common-held notions of college-readiness at Riverside. As such, my stance on college readiness, as both an educator and a researcher, are complicated by these tensions—an educational system that reinforces educational disparities and the immediacy of supporting students within the current system, however flawed, such that they are not further marginalized.

I would also like to acknowledge school as a complicated space and not as a binary system and want to stay away from essentializing both schools and students. Schools can operate simultaneously as sites of oppression, but also as sites for transformation and hope. Many students, in under-resourced communities and schools thrive and ultimately succeed academically in the current setting. As one key example, students and parents at Riverside College Prep were intentional and committed to gaining access to educational opportunities that would provide a pathway to college—and the charter school system offered such opportunities. Thus, students who come from under-resourced, low-income communities can often utilize the school system to transform their lives despite the
broader oppressive contexts of urban education. Alternatively, students in more privileged contexts may find that schooling doesn’t fit their needs despite the resources made available to them. In the midst of these tensions and contradictions, I want to know how students make sense of their schooling experiences.

The way in which students make sense of their academic identities is not independent of schooling processes, which operate to inform or shape these identities. It is important to consider how space and place shape these processes through expectations, goals, and socialization practices (both explicit and implicit). In this case, Riverside College Prep, an urban charter school, opened its doors in the wake of an education reform movement that had induced school closings both in the neighborhood and in the district. The school closings invariably resulted in the disenfranchisement of many students who attended these “failing schools” (Ayers & Klonsky, 2006; Lipman, 1998; Stovall, 2005). Charter schools were offered to students as an alternative to the district’s public schools. But these options were limiting in scope and did not address larger systemic inequities within the district (Leonardo, 2003, 2009; Lipman, 2004; Powell, 2005). Additionally, researchers have suggested that charter schools struggle with operational and structural issues in the first few years of existence (Farmer-Hinton, 2011 Lockheed & Jimenez, 1996). Riverside opened as a charter school and was touted as a college-readiness institution, ostensibly placing it in sharp contrast to the public schools in the neighborhood.

It should be noted that the historical development of schooling for Black students has created an unequal trajectory relative to future life outcomes that persists today (Anderson 1988; Watkins, 2001; Williams, 2005). These systemic inequities have
created particular ways of speaking about both “urban” students and “urban” schools (Apple, 2010; Gee, 1996; Giroux, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Leonardo, 2009). These particular ways of speaking are informed by broad national discourses on schooling and students—discourses that are ideologically framed.

In one of my initial conversations with Riverside co-founder Edward Saint-John, he emphasized the importance of teaching “poor students of color” that they could succeed in college by cultivating dispositions and academic identities in which “a kid [would] really understand their intellectual power, that they’re smart, and it doesn’t go away” (personal communication, September 2, 2010). Saint-John framed this statement in contrast to other students in the city who attended better-performing schools: “You can’t shut up those kids [in better-performing and better-resourced schools]. They got an opinion...and they are very confident” (personal communication, September 2, 2010). As such, Saint-John understood college-readiness as a function of confidence and disposition toward learning—a disposition, or academic identity, that needed to be explicitly cultivated in students at Riverside. More importantly, his understanding of the “intellectual power” of Riverside students suggested an ideological orientation regarding students’ academic identities, both at Riverside and at other “urban” schools. As Saint-John made meaning of his work at Riverside College Prep, the language of “resilience”, “kindness” and “responsiveness” was prominent in his discourse, and while in and of themselves these ways of framing schooling practices are in no way nefarious, it did compel me to consider how and why, for Saint-John and others, these were the most important considerations for teaching students at Riverside. Furthermore, it led me to think about how the profession of teaching is conceptualized at Riverside, in
particular, and in urban schools, more generally. In my experiences as a teacher educator, I have encountered some distinct attitudes and presumptions by both pre-service and in-service teachers, which reflect at times, fears and reservations about what it means to teach in urban contexts. For example, one student claimed that she did not have the “stamina or the expertise” to teach in urban schools, and that “teaching in the suburbs would just be easier”. In many instances, discussions on pedagogy and cultivating a classroom community would reveal fears about classroom management and losing authority and control in the classroom. As a counter to the prevailing notion that teaching in urban schools is undesirable is the idea that teaching in these contexts is noble and worthy of one’s service and furthermore, that teaching students who are identified as “at-risk” operates as a civilizing force in classrooms and communities. Both positions, while standing in opposition, are not necessarily contradictory, as both reflect the problematic assumptions about Black communities and students. As Saint-John was a co-founder of the school and occupied a position of power, his ideologies are important to consider as part of how college-readiness was articulated and practiced at Riverside. It is equally important to consider how his framing of Riverside students as “poor students of color” indicated a paternalistic attitude toward both the students at Riverside and the communities that they came from—which for him, necessitated a need to “save” students from themselves.

As an instantiation of this ideology, Jane Park, an English teacher, reflected on the students in her classroom by stating that, “Each seat is filled with a story and soul and something that is broken” (personal communication, November 3, 2010). These ideologies and attitudes toward students as articulated by Saint-John and Park can be
framed as racialized understandings, because they were constructed in contrast to students in better-performing schools who were mostly white, middle-class students.

These deficit-informed understandings of Black students and their academic identities indicate broader ideologies that underwrote the goals and mission of the school. Riverside’s mission foregrounded both “college-readiness” and “resilience” in its ultimate goal to prepare students for college. But I wished to understand what role these assumptions—that Riverside students were un-resilient learners and that teachers and staff were acting as the students’ saviors—played in formulating the socialization practices at Riverside. Furthermore, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of socialization, I focused my observation on the ways in which ideologies and discourses mediated those socialization practices.

The rise of urban school reform efforts and the development of cities have encouraged many scholars to look critically at how these reform efforts impact Black students (Apple, 2001, 2010; Leonardo, 2003, 2009; Lipman, 1998, 2004; Watkins, 2001). The extant literature by critical educators and researchers has explored how the economic development and demographic shifts in urban spaces have historically given rise to policies that constrained access to education within communities of color and exacerbated segregation in “diverse” cities (Betancur & Gills, 2000; Cherminsky, 2005; Conger, 2005; Drake & Cayton, 1945; Feagin, 1998; Flinspach & Banks, 2005; Frazier, 1951; Halpern, 1995; Harvey, 1973, 2007; Herrick, 1971; Hirsch, 1983; Homel, 1984; Lemann, 1991; Logan & Swanstrom, 1990; Mohraz, 1979; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012; Smith, 1987). The literature has also explored how in-school segregation has been maintained through tracking policies (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2005; Laosa, 2005; Levin, 1988; Mickelson,
2005; Oakes, 1985; Reardon & Yun, 2005; Wheelock, 1992). While these policies have informed the broader structures of the political economy, they also raise concerns about how schools as political and cultural institutions may inform the education experiences of students.

The predominant perception by students at Riverside was that they were somehow “unique” or “different” from their peers who attended public schools because they had college aspirations. This perception indicates that students at Riverside saw college aspirations as a function of individual choice and not as an expected step of schooling. Consequently, intentionality—making the “choice” to pursue post-secondary education—was perceived as exceptional. The development of schooling practices and education policies in poor communities has provided unequal access to and opportunities for college (Watkins, 2001; Leonardo, 2009). Many scholars have argued that school restructuring and reform discourse appropriates the language of free markets, capitalism, and corporatization, serving the economic and political interests of the privileged but obscuring the role of systemic and institutional inequity as the primary determinant of “failing schools” (Apple, 2000, 2010; Harvey, 1973, 2007; Lipman, 1998, 2004; Powell, 2005). The term “choice” is used as a widely touted benefit of capitalism and the free market economy, but it misdirects and distorts the inherent injustices of the education system, implicitly placing ownership of failure on an individual student or school. Powell’s (2005) study found the following:

Choice has been marketed very effectively in recent years in the form of vouchers, charter schools, and neighborhood schools (the most common form)—even to the point of equating it, and the free market system generally, with democracy itself. Choice is
publicly discussed as a private act, although choices are in fact relational, with social consequences. If one is permitted to choose to maintain a school district as white and economically exclusive, for example, the choices of non-white low income students will necessarily be constrained. (p. 289)

In essence, vouchers and charter school movements are structured in ways that can only be utilized in struggling school districts (Leonardo, 2003, 2009; Lipman, 2004; Powell, 2005; Wells, 1996). Thus by their very nature, the choices that were made available to students at Riverside were already constrained.

Scholars have noted the role that discourse and ideology play in sustaining and normalizing otherwise unjust policies and practices concerning urban education and school reform (Ayers & Klonsky, 2006; Leonardo, 2003, 2009; Lipman, 1998, 2004; Stovall, 2005). These discourses, as noted above, play a significant role in driving education policy, but they also inform meaning systems within a school building. As such, the project of college-readiness in urban spaces is an instantiation of hegemonic cultural practices that are driven by dominant ideologies and assumptions about Black students. Consequently, schools are racialized spaces (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Lewis, 2003; Tatum, 1999, bound by ideologies of whiteness (Leonardo, 2009) and normalized and upheld by the practice of color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Gotanda, 1995). Race acts as an organizing principle in cultural spaces (i.e., schools as institutions), and racialized discourses within these spaces are important to consider when examining how students make meaning of their schooling experiences. Utilizing identity as a lens for examining school practices is useful in that it highlights both how identity is discursively constructed and how some differences in achievement cannot be accounted for through other variables (Berry, 2003,
2005; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Guest & Schneider, 2003; Martin, 2000, 2006; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Most importantly, as high school students grow into adulthood, which will require them to navigate other spaces and institutions, it is imperative that educators understand the socialization processes by which their students come to know themselves as learners and as future college students.

Given the ways in which both local and distal contexts have given rise to ideologies and discourses concerning Black students and learning, I explored in great depth the processes of academic socialization and student identity construction at Riverside. I examined the school as an ideological, discursive, and racialized space that informed practices and policies that constituted the mosaic of the students’ academic socialization. Taken together as a system of meanings, these ideologies, discourses, and practices gave rise to how educators constructed academic identities of Black students at Riverside. I also examined how these academic identities were resisted, negotiated, and appropriated by students. The following are guiding prompts that I utilized to examine these processes and to gain a comprehensive understanding of academic socialization and identity development at Riverside:

(1) What are some of the most salient institutional discourses and ideologies of “college-readiness,” and how do they inform meanings, goals, and socialization practices at Riverside College Prep?

(2) What are some of the tensions, affordances, and constraints that emerge from the academic socialization practices at Riverside College Prep?

(3) What are some of the ways that teacher beliefs and dominant discourses inform socialization practices within the English department?
(4) How do students respond to and make meaning of the various socializing mechanisms in the classroom and at Riverside College Prep?

I focused on these guiding prompts because of the highly politicized nature of urban school reform, the charter school movement, and the racialization of students in school spaces. Given that the national discourse concerning school reform is both racialized and ideologically purposed to maintain class and racial privilege, I believed these prompts would provide insight into (1) how discourse and ideology operate within the local context of an urban charter school; (2) how academic socialization is practiced and, furthermore, how these practices are racialized; and (3) how students understand their academic experiences and their academic identities in this context.

These prompts required forms of inquiry that would allow me to examine school processes both critically and comprehensively across a duration of time in which issues of power, meaning, and discourse could be meaningfully unpacked; as such, critical ethnography and critical discourse analysis [CDA] served as the most effective tools for teasing out and identifying the various layers of meanings, relationships of power, ideologies, and practices at Riverside. In order to understand how these ideologies and discourses impacted academic socialization and framed academic identities, I engaged in nine months of ethnographic data collection, over the course of one academic year at Riverside College Prep. I engaged in participant observation by attending staff meetings, and I conducted interviews with teachers and staff, giving focused attention to the ideological frames of discourses on students, learning, and the teaching profession. I utilized a cross-case analysis to explore broad trends exhibited by students in one AP English Language Arts classroom. Finally, I utilized case study to highlight the schooling
experiences of two students by examining their academic identities and the socialization practices they experienced.

1.1 Researcher Subjectivity and Counter-Storytelling

The writing and the interpretations presented in this dissertation are not neutral or objective. While I attempt to remain faithful to the meanings and accounts offered by the participants, I am aware that my dissertation reflects my own susceptibility to various ideologies that characterize the dominant narratives and counter-narratives. I acknowledge that all observation is theory-laden, and my observations and analysis give very focused attention to ideologies and discourses that were racialized. This lens is informed by my own value systems, experiences, and philosophical beliefs about teaching, education, and research. There are multiple avenues of analyses, alternate explanations, and competing explanations that could have been derived from these sets of data. However, my explanation of discourses, ideologies, and academic socialization practices are based on my own epistemological underpinnings, my ideologies about the function of schooling, my personal experiences with discursive framing. My emotional and professional investment in this work is tied to the belief that school should serve as a transformative mechanism, and more importantly should provide students with economic and social mobility. In fact, schooling has operated as a transformative mechanism in my life, and I have benefitted greatly from the current educational system that had prepared me for the types of academic tasks and challenges I would encounter in college. My personal experiences as a woman of color in both professional and educational settings have shaped how I construct meaning in discourse and social interactions, namely, my belief that race operates as a
salient factor, either consciously or unconsciously in these social interactions, and discourses. In addition to my personal experiences, the expansive literature on racial formation, racial discourse, and how race operates in schooling have informed both how I analyzed the data and constructed this narrative. As such, my analysis is open to challenge and re-articulation.

This dissertation has been influenced by three salient sets of experiences that shaped my identity, and my value systems: (1) a family legacy that is tied to the importance of speaking truth to power; (2) my experiences as a student being confronted with my teachers’ assumptions about my own racial, cultural, and religious identities; and (3) my experiences as high school teacher working in an under-resourced, urban school.

The development of my own education began three generations ago, in a village in Bihar, India. My maternal great-grandfather, Shair Muhammad, had the vision to send all his granddaughters to school in a time when that practice was still considered unthinkable. This radical choice left him ostracized by his peer community and cost him a lot of business. And while he experienced no direct benefit from his choices, it profoundly transformed the lives of three generations of women who had the luck of being born into his family. In his family—my family—women’s education has always been insisted upon and normalized. This legacy has been passed down to me from my mother, my aunts, and my grandmother—the assumption that I would pursue higher education, and not as part of a unique or exceptional life path that differed from women in general or Indian women in particular. The expectation was part of the variety of options available to me, intended to allow me to carve out a life path that would ensure my financial independence. College readiness has come to mean for me, an important difference between a life of poverty and a
life of privilege. Access to educational opportunities in the lives of both my parents provided them with social mobility and opportunities outside of India—opportunities that took them out of a life of poverty. The life histories of the women in my family, and their struggle to gain full access and participation in society, have served as the dominant metanarrative of my life and how I frame my work as a teacher and researcher: Equitable access to education is a right that all individuals deserve, and it should be demanded—loudly. While educational access has been an important struggle in my family’s history, and has had a transformative impact in my life—and that belief system drives my work as both a teacher and a researcher, I also understand that college-readiness operates not only as a goal, but also as an important metaphor in the “American Dream” narrative.

I was first confronted with the “uniqueness” and “difference” of my identity as an educated Indian Muslim woman in my interactions with others outside my family. This race- and gender-based identity was reflected back to me by teachers in ways that I found to be disconcerting, akin to a mirror image that I didn’t necessarily recognize. When I was 10 years old, I was sitting in my fifth grade class and, during a geography lesson, my teacher said to me, “You are very lucky to be here in America, because women in India are really oppressed.” It was the first time in school that I felt shame about who I was, burdened and aware that my actions were somehow representative of my people, and I became cognizant of what it meant to be viewed as different by my teachers. This experience, like many others in my elementary education, left me with sense of cultural dissonance, aware that I was occupying two spaces: one in which I was an agent, and the other in which I was discursively constructed and made to confront other people’s ideas of who I was—not merely as an individual, but in relation to my cultural and ethnic
background. As such, my identity was not independent of the collective understanding of what it meant to be Indian. This was particularly important given that as a child, like many other children, I saw my teachers as authorities whose words had weight and meaning.

As a graduate student, when I casually referenced that I was a Muslim to one of my professors, he paused his conversation with another student and looked at me. “Is that somehow surprising?” I asked. He replied, “Well, yes. You are very outspoken.” These moments, along with many others, were part of the racialized practices of schooling I experienced. In some instances, as a young child, I internalized them; in other instances, as an adult, I took a critical stance on them because of my more advanced maturity and experience.

These racialized experiences are connected to the evolution (or developing understandings) of my Muslim and female identities. These identities are perpetually subject to ideological and discursive constructions in the United States and elsewhere: Muslims as “the other” and Indian women as victims of misogyny. Against the backdrop of the Iran-Contra affair, the uprisings in the Gaza Strip, and the battles in Beirut, I grew up listening to Peter Jennings inform me about the chaos, confusion, and violence coming out of “the Muslim world.” Furthermore, what I learned of non-Western women in school or through National Geographic magazine was in the context of oppression and patriarchy.

Much like the Black/white binary (DuBois, 1973) that frames racial identity and racial formation, there exists a Western/Eastern binary (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1994a, 1994b; Spivak, 1994, 1999) that serves as a construct for organizing religious and cultural identity, an all-too-familiar paradigm in my experiences. These experiences shaped my understanding of how racial socialization operates, especially between teachers and
students—and how the power imbalance between teacher and student may at times have deleterious effects on how students come to understand their own racial and academic identities, especially at a young age. Consequently, these experiences informed the issues, dynamics, and practices that I paid particular attention to as a researcher; for example, I attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which teachers define students and their academic or racial identities, as well as how they make sense of students’ identities within the context of schooling. In addition, I paid attention to any language of “othering” in which teachers or staff discussed students’ identities with explicit or implicit reference to an underwritten ideology or “norm,” such as using white experiences in comparison with the experiences of their students.

As a high school teacher, I was confronted with how funding, resources, professional discourse, and structures of schooling were key constraints in the academic lives of my students. Unlike the educational opportunities in my life and in the lives of my family members, which served as transformative mechanisms, the school system in which I taught served students in segregated neighborhoods and provided differential access and opportunity for my students relative to their peers in better-resourced neighborhoods in the same district. Furthermore, I saw a stark difference between my own high school socialization into academic practices and the options that were made available to my students. For me, college was an expected outcome, and my counselors in high school helped me navigate the process of college admissions and application by providing me with information about various colleges and universities. Vocational schools were never offered to me as an option for my post-secondary career. However, my students did not have the resources to attend a well-resourced suburban school or the advantages inherent to that
experience, and many of them were counseled into post-secondary options like vocational schools without the advantage of explicit structures or the opportunity to consider a four-year college. My experiences as a teacher led me to think about differential access to schooling and how that might impact my students’ academic identities, particularly students of color, given the power and authority of teachers and institutions. Given this set of experiences, I am particularly interested in certain phenomena, namely how ideology and discourse impact the ways that racial identity is constructed for and by students, as well as how these ideologies and discourses inform the educational lives of students through socialization practices.

Through the course of my study, I came to know the teachers and staff at Riverside. In particular, I had professional and friendly relationships with some of the teachers in the English department who were included in my study. In coming to know them as teachers and as individuals, I found them to be dedicated to working with students. They found teaching to be a meaningful profession. Their intentions were good. Many teachers would often take time before or after school to work with students, and they were responsive to the students’ articulated needs. As an institution, Riverside College Prep did an effective job of creating a warm environment and culture for its students. In contrast to high school at which I had worked at previously, which was riddled with operational issues and a lack of structure that led many of my students to find the school climate uninviting, Riverside students genuinely felt comfortable and part of the school community. I want to emphasize that while my work points to critical tensions with respect to ideologies and practices concerning college-readiness, and in many moments this dissertation takes a critical stance on those practices, the teachers and administrators I interviewed at Riverside were well-
meaning in their approach to their students, despite the fact that the overall approach was fraught with complications. What I hope to capture and communicate are the tensions, complications, affordances, and constraints that emerged given the assumptions some teachers and administrators made about students, learning, and the various forces that impacted the educational lives of their students—a counter-story. I realize that counter-stories rely on the perspective of the storyteller. As such, my interpretations of student, teacher, and administrator experiences are a function of my experiences and identities, my core values concerning education, and the belief systems that I have developed (Bell, 2003; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorozano & Yosso, 2002).

As researchers, we take up ideological and theoretical orientations that are informed both by our belief systems and by our understanding of what is knowable in the world. The concerns for social justice and equity are important functions of my research and imperative to ensuring transformation. With this position, I acknowledge a lack of neutrality, but I believe it is integral to ameliorating the educational experiences of students. As the focus of my research is to explore the experiences of students in relation to academic socialization practices, I approach this work through a mode of inquiry that affords me opportunities to describe the meanings of various actors, taking into particular consideration the relationships of power between them.

A primary purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of how ideology and discourse shape school practices designed for Black secondary students. In the case of Riverside, I want to peel back the layers of “college-readiness” and unpack meanings, goals, and practices. While current education reform tools, such as the Common Core State Standards, foreground college-readiness, these reforms present it as part of a master
narrative related to standards, access, and international competitiveness. In my view, peeling back the layers of college-readiness at Riverside helps to reveal a counter-narrative. This dissertation presents that counter-narrative. The following section provides a high-level overview of the dissertation.

1.2 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review that begins with how academic achievement of Black students has been ideologically and discursively constructed by both scholars and educators, namely through a deficit ideology and oppositional theory, and how these ideologies have been problematized by various scholars. I then outline how the deficit ideologies have informed the discourse both on urban school reform and college-readiness, highlighting how schools are racialized spaces. Given the role that ideology and discourse play in the discursive construction of Black student academic identity, I give focused attention to the scholarship on identity development, racial identity, resilience, and academic socialization. I end with the burgeoning area of scholarship concerning disciplinary identity and academic socialization in literacy and math as an entry point for examining both academic socialization and identity development at Riverside College Prep.

Chapter 3 describes the methods, sources of data, and plans for inquiry.

Chapter 4 examines academic socialization at the institutional level through an examination of the dominant discourses, ideologies, and school-wide policies in effect at Riverside. The results of the analysis indicate there were two dominant ideological orientations at the school, namely deficit and missionary, and that they led to practices of
remediation. These ideologies were tied to the following discourse themes that emerged through interviews: (1) schools as spaces of urban revitalization; (2) schools as spaces of student transformation; (3) teachers as primary change agents; (4) teaching as a spiritual and emotional act; (4) students as sufferers of a cultural deficit; (5) poverty as a roadblock to learning; and (6) students as lacking in resilience and motivation. These assumptions about students were reflected in the policies at Riverside. Additionally, these ideologies—namely that socio-emotional socialization is integral to students’ academic growth and is an important precursor to the same—undergirded the academic socialization practices at Riverside. As such, academic socialization at Riverside was perceived as a developmental trajectory in which socio-emotional socialization was a necessary step toward college-readiness that had to be addressed before any academic skills were addressed. This established practices of remediation and an over-emphasis of emotional support that led to practices that constrained academic growth and lowered expectations.

Chapter 5 examines academic socialization at the departmental level and how the emphasis on socio-emotional socialization led to practices of negotiation, i.e., students were allowed to negotiate disciplinary practices and academics (as evidenced in some teacher interviews). The practices that emerged at the departmental level with respect to instructional practice and student learning, supported by the foundational ideologies explored in Chapter 4, were (1) the growth model; (2) the practice of teachers cultivating strong, family-like relationships with their students; and (3) lowered expectations for students through the practice of “flexibility.” The various practices and ideologies also served to discursively construct students as (1) un-resilient learners; (2) lacking responsibility; and (3) lacking knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors.
This discursive construction is what I refer to as the students’ *institutional construction of identity*. My study also indicates that not all teachers felt a strong alignment to the dominant institutional discourses at Riverside. One teacher proposed a counter-narrative to the academic socialization practices at the school, referring to how the enforced practices were drawn from a deficit model of Black students. Other teachers found that the school-wide policies of discipline and socio-emotional support led to negotiations between teacher and student that harmed the education process. Chapter 5 also offers a description of the AP English Language Arts teacher’s alignment to institutional discourses and ideologies, as his classroom was the site of my nine-month observation. This description, while not evaluative, provides context for the academic socialization practices within the classroom. My analysis reveals that he was ambivalent about the instructional policies that the department implemented, namely the growth model. Additionally, his responses in the interviews suggest that he did not ascribe to the *institutional construction of identity* when describing his students or their learning processes. In fact, his responses suggest that while dominant discourses and ideology privileged socio-emotional support as a precursor to learning, he believed that academic support is a more effective means of achieving academic resilience. Additionally, he privileged student agency and acknowledged variation between and complexity within the identities of his students.

Chapter 6 explores the *institutional construction of identity* with respect to how students situated themselves within and against these formulations. Through the use of cross-case analysis, I explore the foundational assumptions of identities in light of student responses within the AP English Language Arts classroom I observed. Student responses indicate that the students displayed strong resilience and knowledge of school practices.
Furthermore, my analysis indicates that the academic socialization practices, both school-wide and department-wide, may have constrained opportunities for academic growth in that the *institutional construction of identity* formulating the basis of the school's socialization practices was limited in scope and did not address the complexity of identities displayed in the class. Furthermore, given the negotiation theme that emerged in my analysis in Chapter 5, these practices led to flexibility in discipline relating to homework and task completion, to the detriment of the students.

Chapter 7 uses case studies to explore the education experiences of two Black male students, James Sullivan and Leroy Blackwell in the AP English Language Arts class in the context of classroom practices, school practices, and their academic identities. These two cases highlight the problematic ways in which Black male achievement is addressed at Riverside. My analysis indicates that the focus on socio-emotional socialization, constrained their opportunities for academic growth and the formation of college-ready skills and habits of mind.

Chapter 8 explores the key findings and implications for future research as well as the limitations of the study.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

“The first step we must take in achieving a transformation of this public discourse [on education] is to recognize race as a social construct. Race has no scientific reality, but it does have a powerful social reality: it orders and affects our real-life experiences. White America has always signified who is entitled to privilege, as we see so clearly in the case of educational disparities.”

- Powell, 2005, p. 288

This literature review begins with a discussion of the role of ideology and discourse in framing educational inquiry and creating systems of meaning. I briefly outline some conventional perspectives on Black academic achievement, namely deficit ideologies and oppositional theory; how these perspectives have led to racialized understandings about Black students; and how those understandings inform both teacher and student positioning—teachers as missionaries and students as recipients of knowledge and school practices. I also offer competing discourses from an emerging body of scholarship that interrogates and problematizes these conventional understandings. I then outline the development of urban school reform efforts and the emergence of particular discourses concerning charter schools and college-readiness as a response to the discursive and ideological formations of Black student academic identity—formulations that are undergirded by deficit ideologies. Given these broader ideologies and discourses that discursively formulate identities for Black students, and the processes by which they emerge (through socialization practices), I give focused attention to sociocultural, sociological, and psychological perspectives on identity development and socialization practices, outlining the literature on identity, racial identity development, and resilience,
respectively, followed by a review of literature on socialization and identity development in school practices that examines discipline-based academic identities.

**2.1 Framing Educational Inquiry: Ideologies and Discourses**

Many scholars have noted the role of ideology in informing relationships between individuals, groups, and classes as well as the process by which they come to be represented in discourse. Drawing upon a Marxist framework, Althusser (Elliott, 1994) explored how material relationships at the “base” inform a “superstructure,” namely cultural forms, institutions, ideas, meanings, and values. These structural elements are heavily influenced by those who control the means of production. Gramsci (1971) discussed the mechanisms by which dominant groups maintain control, both material and immaterial, through the use of discourse that is normalized and constituted as common sense—what he refers to as “hegemony.” Thus discourse functions as a cultural tool to maintain hierarchies in social and class relationships, extending well beyond the realm of discourse or ideology. Foucault (1981) extended the inquiry on discourse to consider not only class and social relationships writ large, but also how discourse informs individual identities through the politics of representation. Thus dominant ideologies and discourse frame individuals and individual identities through *language* in a process he referred to as discursive formation.

Education scholars have pondered the various discourses and how they mediate values, ways of being in the world, and representations of those sensibilities by exploring how discourses are ideologically grounded through what they promote or devalue and how they silence certain ideas, norms, values, and experiences. Gee (1996) referred to these
formulations as d/Discourses, where discourses with a lowercase “d” are the content or the “what” of the language we communicate, and Discourses with a capital “D” are “ways of being in the world” (p.142) in that they are tied to how we engage socially and culturally in various contexts. Consequently, certain Discourses are privileged over others, and they exist in hierarchical relationships (Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1981; Gee, 1996) and when examined, they cannot be separated from history or relationships of power (Collins & Blot, 2003; Foucault, 1981; Gee, 1996).

2.2 Ideologies of Black Student Achievement: Some Current Perspectives

Education discourse when viewed as a hegemonic practice has produced and invoked language around Black student achievement undergirded by deficit ideologies. One particular discourse is the language of the “achievement gap” as a way of understanding schooling processes and academic achievement of Black students. The use of key metrics for assessing educational progress, such as graduation rates, standardized testing, and track placement (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; O’Connor, Horvat, & Lewis, 2006), have constructed Black students as underperforming in relation to their white peers. Perry (Perry, Hilliard, & Steele, 2004) problematized this view of academic achievement with the assertion that the achievement gap discourse fails to acknowledge the “long and persistent denial and limiting of educational opportunities for African Americans” (p. 6), as well as the conditions that promote high achievement. In fact, according to Perry, the danger of the achievement gap discourse is that it provides avenues for reinforcing the “ideology of African American moral, cultural, and intellectual deficiency” (p. 9). As such, a heavily under-theorized but emerging body of scholarship has reframed the discourse on
achievement by examining the strengths, cultural capital, resilience, and environments that promote high achievement (Hilliard, 2003; Martin, 2000, 2003; Perry et al., 2004; Steele, 1992, 1997).

2.2.2 Deficit Ideologies

The achievement gap discourse is one instantiation of deficit ideologies with respect to Black students. Further disrupting the educational progress of students of color is the pathologizing of Black academic achievement. This pathology is implicitly understood as a function of lack of effort and ability on the part of the student (Martin, 2000, 2011), further minimalizing the role of teaching and instruction. It is important to note that lack of access to resources and highly qualified teachers further complicates the schooling process for many students of color (Wilkinson, Morrow, & Chou, 2008).

Deficit ideologies assume that achievement is a result of innate ability (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Jensen, 1969, 1972, 1973), cultural values, and parenting styles (Bloom, Davis, & Hess, 1965; Deutsch, 1967; Frost & Hawkes, 1966; Gottlieb & Ramsey, 1967; Lewis, 1966). In essence, the “home culture” provides inadequate support and preparation for academic success, leading to significantly lower outcomes (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Beck & Muia 1980; Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Kronik, Peterson, Morton, & Smith, 1989; Labov, 1982; Villegas, 1988). This theory assumes that middle-class values are the normative standard and that there is an inherent deficit in the cultures of minority students (Caplan et al., 1991; Labov, 1982; Villegas, 1988).

The deficit ideologies are instantiated in the codes that many educators use for children of color: “at-risk,” “urban,” and “struggling.” In effect, students are labeled, sorted, and
framed before they even enter school. What is not considered is the role that schooling, institutions, and school practices play in sustaining the lack of equitable access and resources. The deficit ideology also erases differences within ethnic groups, class groups, and gender groups. But scholars have noted significant variation among the performances of Black students (Attaway & Bry, 2004; Cross & Slater, 2000; Dachter-Loury, 1989; O'Connor, 1999; Perry et al., 2004). An emerging body of research, conversely, has examined how Black children draw upon their families, their membership in a racial group, and their own talents as rich resources for growth (Anderson, 1988; Clewell, Anderson, & Thorpe, 1992; Martin, 2000; Berry, 2008). In a later section in this chapter, in which I discuss identity and socialization, I give more focused attention to the literature on resilience as a strong counter-narrative to the deficit ideologies of Black student achievement.

Missionary ideologies in Black education.

The deficit ideology leads to a particular orientation toward Black students that positions educators and teachers as agents of change in students’ lives and, consequently, schools as spaces of reform and revitalization. As such, teachers are constructed as missionaries acting as mediators between their students and those students’ academic success and future self-actualization, enacting a power dynamic in which educators are the key drivers of change. In the global context of Western imperialism and colonization, missionaries have historically occupied a very complicated space with respect to the “natives” they hoped to help, transform, shape, enlighten, and so forth. While missionaries may have participated individually to “ameliorate” the lives of native peoples through their
work of education, this work was also complicit with motives of political and economic expansion on behalf of the institutions they served and represented (Achebe, 1989; Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Hitchens, 1995; Said, 1994a; 1994b; Spivak, 1987, 1994, 1999; Tiberondwa, 1980). Analogously, the work of missionaries in educating freed slaves in the South during the post-Civil War Reconstruction period was equally fraught with complications; former slaves ardently campaigned for the rise of universal education and a state-sponsored education system “in the persistent struggle to fashion a system of formal education that prefigured their liberation from peasantry” (Anderson, 1988, p. 3). In their quest for greater agency and economic advancement, and in an attempt to “restructure and control their lives” (Anderson, 1988, p 3), those former slaves were the first to subvert the long-held ideologies of antebellum South plantation owners concerning education, society, and rights to public education (Anderson, 1988; Williams, 2005). The growing popularity of mass schooling, in both public and political discourse, propelled by a demand and insistence by Blacks for social participation and equal access, led to federal legislation in 1868 and the establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau (Douglas, 1909; Knight, 1918). The establishment of the Bureau, with the help of northern industrialists, who had their own political and economic agenda, gave rise to a growing number of missionary-sponsored schools in the South (Watkins, 2001). According to Douglas (1909), the South was uncivilized ground with a high population of “incomplete Americans” (p. 44), ripe for the work of the American Missionary Association. In fact, Douglas commented on the state of the region, writing, “This marks the South off from the rest of the nation, and indeed from all the more enlightened portions of Christendom” (p. 46). The South, and the people being served by the American Missionary Schools, were perceived as uncivilized and in dire need
of a civilizing education. Douglas (1909) characterizes the work of missionaries as one of uplift: “But confessed, direct, and systematic efforts for the education and uplift of negroes have been largely lacking” (p. 59). This broad conception constructed freed slaves as needing guidance and saving. The role of missionaries in establishing schools for Blacks was integral in providing educational access to freed slaves. In fact, there was an emerging movement during Reconstruction by Southern Blacks to build churches and schools (Payne, 1891). It should be acknowledged that missionary schooling in the South had some broad and positive impacts in educating freed slaves and their children, and furthermore, Northern Black missionaries, such as Daniel Payne, played a significant role in establishing and running missionary schools.

According to Watkins (2001), while those missionaries drew upon the ideals of “spiritual humanism,” their individual motivations were not “inimical” (p. 14) to the broader political and economic interests of northern industrialists. Williams (2005) explored the subjectivity of missionary teachers and the paternalistic ways in which their work was framed by historians, noting specifically how freed people were broadly regarded not as participants, but rather as “subjects who were acted upon, rather than actors” (p. xx). Furthermore, he explored how missionaries broadly conceived of their own work, occupying spaces that were invested simultaneously in social justice and in the missionaries’ own self-promotion and heroic status. However, Williams uncovered how freed people were active participants both in their education and in their ultimate pursuit of economic and social mobility:

I began to see too, that in many places schools that history had labeled American Missionary Association schools, for example, could just as easily have been called
freedpeople's schools. Certainly missionary employees taught in the schools, but time after time, the sources revealed that in fact former slaves conceived of the school, donated their churches to house it or built new cabins from scratch, provided fuel, and paid tuition. (Williams, 2005, p. xxiii)

Beyond the ways in which discourse and ideology defined relationships between missionaries and southern Blacks, the project of education was tied to broader practices of charity and philanthropy that Watkins (2001) defined as a “body of safe reform, that is reform without revolt” (p. 15). These practices, as Watkins argued, framed and informed minority education in America and provided differential access and opportunity for Black students well past industrialization and post-Civil War Reconstruction.

The history of missionary schooling in the South, and the attitudes and relationships that developed over time in the South is an important consideration for analyzing how the education of Black children is couched in other seemingly different contexts. The language of uplift, revitalization, and saving is a broad conceptualization that many missionaries had about their work in the South, and how that work was practiced. Analogously, urban spaces are also more broadly conceptualized in both culture and educational discourse as spaces that need civilizing.

2.2.3 Oppositional Theory

A little over three decades ago, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) drew upon Ogbu’s earlier work (1974, 1978) on oppositional identity and the notion of “acting white.” This is a term that has been reconstituted, re-conceptualized, and highly politicized in education discourse. The model of oppositional identity, which is one part of a larger cultural-
ecological theory model, posited that involuntary minorities, i.e., non-immigrant Blacks in America, were aware of the historical oppression they faced. These systemic roadblocks prevented them from improving their social standing. Consequently, these minorities felt a deep distrust of institutions and the utility of school (as a white-held institution) to effect change in their lives.

While this model helped to reframe the debate on Black student achievement by moving away from genetic explanations of intelligence, it is limited. As a theory, it oversimplifies the educational experiences of Black students. This homogenization does not address the complications, nuances, and unique specificities of local spaces, nor does it address individual variation or agency. Racial categories are complicated, and other contingent factors such as gender, social class, community resources, peer group norms, and historical location all mediate racial identity (Carter, 2005; Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Foley, 1991; Hochschild, 1995; Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Kao & Tienda, 1995; MacLeod, 1987; Martin, 2000, 2007, 2009a; Mickelson, 1990; O’Connor, 1999). Oppositional theory serves to sustain the hierarchy of white normative standards while simultaneously framing Black-white as oppositional, diametrically opposed, and stable racial categories. Adversely, a growing body of literature has evidenced that many Black youths have higher educational aspirations than their white counterparts (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Carter, 2005; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Diamond, Lewis, & Gordon, 2007; Kao & Tienda, 1995; MacLeod, 1987; Qian & Blair, 1999; Spencer, Noll, Stolfus, & Harpalani, 2001; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). In fact, Harris (2006) specifically addressed oppositional theory in her study, which found that the five major tenets of oppositional theory were not supported in her findings.
2.3 Schools as Racialized and Ideological Spaces

The previous sections identified national discourses and educational perspectives of Black student achievement that reveal foundational assumptions and ideological orientations that discursively produce Black student academic identities. Consequently, schools can be viewed as racialized spaces. More broadly, racial categories and racial identity formation in the United States have served to uphold political, social, and educational dominance of whites (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gunaratnman, 2003; Leonardo, 2003, 2009; Morgan, 1980; Omi & Winant, 1994; Stovall, 2005, 2006a). Thus race and racism (and the education of Black students) must be understood as a complex system of ideologies, discourses, and practices.

Researchers have borne witness to the ways in which racial discrimination and class differences have been institutionalized in schools (Anyon, 1980, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1988, 2010; Davidson, 1996; Delpit, 2006, 1998; Hilliard, 2003; King, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Lee, 2005, 2007; Lewis, 2003; Martin, 2000, 2007; Perry et al., 2004; Shujaa, 1998; Watkins, 2001; Willis, 1977). Contemporary education discourse heavily utilizes Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) model of social reproduction of class, which assumes that different forms of capital are used to maintain social and economic status in society (Apple, 1998, 2001, 2010; Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Lipman, 1998; 2004). Within this area of scholarship, key areas that work to maintain the achievement differential include curriculum, teacher expectations, tracking, and conflict in cultural styles and learning. There is a distinct difference in how and what we teach students based on their socioeconomic status (both implicit and explicit), exemplified through disciplinary
practices and operational structures of schooling, opportunities in programs, and the curriculum in the classroom itself (Anyon, 1980, 1981, 1997; Apple 1998; Barker & Gump, 1964; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Coleman, 1988; Davidson, 1996; Gregory & Smith, 1987; Kozol, 1991; Ornstein, 1990; Willis, 1977). Black students are over-represented in special education classrooms and under-represented in honors tracks (Carbonaro, 2005; Conger, 2005; Kovach & Gordon, 1997; LeTendre, Hofer, & Shimizu, 2003; Oakes, 1985). Coupled with these factors is the reproduction of racial meanings and attitudes, which are embedded in the processes and practices of schooling (Davidson, 1996; Delpit, 1998, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Davidson, 1996). Teachers tend to hold an unfavorable bias toward and perceive more problematic behavior from students of color (Davidson, 1996; Finn, 1972, 1989; Lewis, 2003; Tatum, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, students have distinct perceptions of what teachers expect of them that inform their own behavior (Carter, 2005; Davidson, 1996; Perry et al., 2004).

While it is useful to consider how the structural aspects of schooling can act as a repressive force, in order to rethink how to design learning environments for students, we must still explain the persistent academic achievement of Black students despite these repressive forces. In fact, high achievers are an under-studied area of inquiry (Carter, 2005; Flores-Gonzalez, 1999, 2002; Gandara, 1995; Gonzalez, 1999; Hemmings, 1996; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Luttrell, 1997; Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Perry et al., 2004; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Valenzuela 1999; Berry 2008). And as a mode of inquiry, theories of reproduction do not address the strengths, intellectual resources, and critical engagement of students of color. Therefore it is important to acknowledge that these
theories “[assume] that students do not realize or react to inequality, yet the history of schooling in the United States attests to the struggles of minority groups for inclusion and equal education” (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002, p. 8).

Scholars have deconstructed how hegemonic practices in discourses, policies, and school structures frame students of color in the American education system (Apple, 1996, 2001, 2010; Giroux, 1994; Leonardo, 2003, 2009). Apple (2000) examined how the idea of official knowledge has been shaped by the needs, beliefs systems, and motivations of the conservative right, informing a variety of political spheres such as welfare reform, economy, and education. By utilizing words such as “freedom” and “equality” to enact control in various political spheres, the conservative agenda of the right erases (at least in discourse) the effects of market capitalism on economically suppressed groups. In the sphere of education, Apple (2000) deconstructed how official knowledge is actualized through the movement of privatization and an “interventionist regulatory framework (strong state) that focuses on national standards, and national testing on the other” (p. xxvi). Most importantly, these movements in education are racialized ways of addressing broader economic malaise and class oppression. Giroux (1981, 1994) examined how dominant culture is mediated through schooling via curriculum practices, relationships between teachers and students, and what is accepted as knowledge. Furthermore, he explored how race is codified in both public life and institutions. Leonardo (2009) extended on the work of critical theorists and specifically addresses how whiteness—and ideas of whiteness—serve as the central foundation for how schooling is actualized: “School bureaucracies create their own cultures that codify school experiences and meaning. These multiple codes of conduct and ways of perceiving constantly struggle with
one another for status and control” (p. 7). Furthermore, these codified practices and meanings are part of the hegemonic practices of “colorblindness” that serve to mask racialized practices and policies and to normalize “whiteness” relative to values, cultures, belief systems, and so forth (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Bonilla-Silva deconstructed how, in a colorblind society, the use of codified language to discuss racial minorities has become increasingly common after the Civil Rights era, during which any discourse or public acknowledgement of racial bias became taboo. He cited linguistic moves, speech patterns, and semantic strategies, to name a few, as tools that individuals utilize to circumvent any explicit acknowledgement of race. However, these speech practices are heavily encoded with racialized assumptions and biases. An under-theorized space of inquiry, consequently, involves the processes by which Black student identity is discursively constructed and the schooling processes that unfold in light of ideologically grounded and racially coded discourses concerning schooling, teaching, learning, and students. These racially coded discourses in schools are embedded contexts within the larger local and national understandings of education, schooling, and urban reform.

2.3.1 Discourses on School Reform and Urban Revitalization

As another instantiation of deficit ideology, the persistent failure of urban schools to provide equitable education to students of color has given rise to particular discourses of school reform and restructuring that focus on “choice,” “accountability,” and “performance” (Apple, 2010; Orfield, 2005; Lipman, 1998, 2004). Gentrification and urban revitalization in cities have widened the economic gap between the rich and the poor (Betancur & Gills, 2000; Harvey, 2007; Lipman, 1998, 2004; Rury & Mirel, 1997). Since Brown vs. Board,
schools have not become any less segregated, and northern cities, much like the one in my study, have seen as much racial and economic segregation as the South. In fact, this segregation has been upheld repeatedly by the United States court system (Chemerinsky, 2005) in the form of funding policies that provide differential support to neighborhoods (Ayon, 1981, 1997; Apple, 1998, 2000, 2001; Lipman, 1998, 2004); political policies that uphold zoning of districts to maintain racial and economic homogeneity (Chemerinsky, 2005; Frankenberg, 2005; Freeman, Scafidi, & Sjoquist, 2005; Reardon & Yun, 2005); and school policies that promote tracking and in-school segregation (Clotfelter et al., 2005; Laosa, 2005; Levin 1988; Mickelson, 2005; Oakes 1985; Reardon & Yun, 2005; Wheelock, 1992). These were all upheld by racial and cultural attitudes of whites in an effort to maintain privilege and resources (Powell, 2005).

The educational disparities across the nation, both racial and economic, have given rise to a shift of foci in the national discourse on school reform, namely from social justice and economic inequality to individual accountability through the language of “excellence,” “competition,” and “accountability” (Wells & Holme, 2005). These shifts in political rhetoric have followed a trend in the last few decades, and they gained momentum through the release of “A Nation at Risk” in 1983, which reported a movement toward high-stakes accountability testing (Heubert, 2005; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Lipman, 2004; Wells & Holme, 2005), thus fueling the argument that “greater ‘equity’ will be a by-product of these new standards and testing reforms—as a rising tide lifts all boats—equalizing opportunities [that have] not been a central focus of the past twenty years of educational policy” (Wells & Holme, 2005, p. 191). However, these policies tend to adversely affect
students of color who attend under-resourced schools (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Lipman, 2004; Powell, 2005).

**Charter school reform: Chicago as a case study.**

In the following section, I describe school reform at the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) because it serves as a useful prototype for examining large-scale urban reform. Because of the city of Chicago’s unique history of Black migration, gentrification, segregation, and ever-shifting education policies, there exists a critical and comprehensive body of research on Chicago’s education policies and urban school reform efforts. Therefore, it serves as a good case study for closely and comprehensively examining urban school reform—and due to the similarities of urban context, Chicago’s reform efforts offer some insight on how urban school systems and school reform efforts operate.

According to Lipman (2004), “schools are key institutions in which the knowledge of those who hold economic and social power are transmitted and legitimated” (p. 6). Thus, schools act not as sites for social, educational, and economic transformation, but rather as sites that are ideologically purposed to sustain privilege. They are complicated spaces where beliefs, cultural values, and ideologies are negotiated and contested.

In order to understand Riverside College Prep, a charter school, it is important to ground it within the context of large-scale urban school reform efforts like those of Chicago. The CPS website states:

Charter Schools are independently operated public schools, approved and certified under the Illinois Charter Schools Law, 105 ILCS5/27A. Charter Schools have freedom from many state laws, district initiatives, and board policies except those related to
testing, health, safety and special education. Charter School teachers and staff are employees of the non-profit organization that governs the charter school or an education management organization hired by the non-profit. Charters have existed in Chicago since 1997 (retrieved on 10-3-10 from http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/faq.shtml#)

As part of a broader neo-liberal agenda to revitalize communities and draw in more businesses, the Renaissance 2010 education policy was introduced in June of 2004. According to Mayor of Chicago at the time, Richard M. Daley:

The fundamental goal of Renaissance 2010 is to turn around Chicago’s most troubled elementary and high schools by creating 100 new schools in neighborhoods across the city over the next six years, providing new educational options to underserved communities and relieving school overcrowding in communities experiencing rapid growth. (retrieved on 10-13-10 from http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/faq.shtml#)

As the six years of the Renaissance 2010 initiative came to a close, there was continued and consistent stagnation in test scores and academic growth among students of color in Chicago. Charter schools had not proven to perform any better than their neighborhood counterparts. The codified language of reform, as identified in the preceding section, included terms such as “choice,” “freedom,” “autonomy,” and “innovation” as way of couching this district initiative as positive (Ayers & Klonsky, 2006; Lipman 2004). More broadly speaking, however, charter schools are part of the privatization of education in which the public sector is becoming corporatized, and these schools serve to change the tenor of discourse from one concerned with equity to one concerned with accountability. According to Ayers and Klonsky (2006), the way in which the charter movement in Chicago
has taken hold not only follows the logic and processes of corporations, but also serves the needs of the business community as well:

What used to be considered public space is now imagined by groups like the Chicago Civic Committee and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (the main patrons of Ren 10) to be part of a new marketing space for dozens of private companies, complete with mergers, large-scale replication, sell-offs, the closing of unprofitable enterprises, direct borrowing in the private market, sale or lease of public school facilities, self-insurance, and the ability to enforce workplace efficiencies and teacher pay rates without the hindrance of union contracts or work rules. (p. 454)

Lipman (2004), in her analysis of school reform and high-stakes testing in Chicago, went even further, adding that the “global city” agenda of the mayor was the impetus for much of the school reform initiative, which had the effect of widening the gap between the rich and the poor in Chicago. The development of Chicago as a global city translated as a selective reinvestment and reinvigoration of urban areas, as this movement relied heavily on the financial sector and minimally on the industrial sector. The resulting effects were higher real estate prices in previously affordable neighborhoods, pushing poor communities, and specifically communities of color, farther and farther into the periphery of the city. Thus, race and class were deeply configured into Chicago’s “development” and in the development of American cities writ large (Feagin, 1998; Harvey, 1973; Haymes, 1995; Logan & Molotch, 1987; Logan & Swanstrom, 1990; Smith, 1987; Smith & Stovall, 2008). According to Lipman (1998, 2004), inequality, social segregation, and cultural isolation were exacerbated, not ameliorated, by the CPS reform effort. In fact, the direct result of policies that dealt with accountability, centralized regulation, and differentiated
schooling—policies operating within the logic of capitalism—was an emphasis on efficiency rather than social benefit.

After the exit of CEO Arne Duncan in January of 2009, CPS brought in Ron Huberman, resulting in high-level organizational changes and the inception of a new accountability framework. The new Office of Performance Management was responsible for keeping track of and laying the foundation for “performance management” systems in various levels of the system, including central office departments, schools, and sub-district area offices. This “corporatization” of schools led to a system of management that relied on “key performance indicators” to assess the progress of schools, principals, teachers, and district-level staff and departments. However, many education scholars critiqued accountability frameworks such as these because they do not promote equity, nor do they narrow disparities in curriculum or teacher effectiveness (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Ayers & Klonksy, 2006; Heubert, 2005; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Lipman, 1998, 2004; Powell, 2005; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2006; Nichols & Berliner, 2005). In fact, this type of management system promotes a narrow focus of skills that standardized tests measure, and those scores don’t necessarily translate into the highly literate and problem-solving competencies that the post-industrial marketplace requires. Consequently, it is poor communities that are affected the most by the accountability-based structure because they are confined to limited curriculum frameworks that emphasize the narrow skill bands that many standardized assessments measure (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Lipman, 1998, 2004).

Given the context of economic change, gentrification, and displacement that many cities like Chicago undergo, and given the focus on accountability systems and performance that
many urban districts face, I would like to consider how these larger policies become systems of meaning at a school like Riverside College Prep.

**College-readiness in the context of the charter school movement.**

Scholars have looked closely at inequity in cities with respect to housing trends, shifts in demographics, neighborhood trends, urban policies and practices, and the management of demographic changes (Anyon, 1997; Drake & Cayton, 1945; Franklin, 1979; Frazier, 1951; Halpern, 1995; Harvey, 2007; Hirsch, 1983; Lemann, 1991; Lipman, 2004; Mirel, 1993; Mohraz, 1979). A burgeoning area of inquiry has considered the ways in which these urban policies and systemic reform efforts affect school practices within a building with respect to charter school systems as well as college-readiness practices (Almond, 2012; Farmer-Hinton, 2002, 2011; Lipman, 2004). Farmer-Hinton (2002) explored the history of economic and political marginalization of Black communities in Chicago as a key driver in school capacity and effectiveness. The migration of Southern Blacks to Chicago propelled a number of city reform efforts to “manage” the influx of minorities in city neighborhoods through housing projects (Drake & Cayton, 1945; Halpern, 1995; Lemann, 1991) and through schools by redrawing boundary lines, implementing branch schools, and requiring transfer permits (Herrick, 1971; Homel, 1984; Mohraz, 1979), essentially creating segregated and unequal schools.

Scholars have noted the growing use of the phrase “college-prep,” both in the discourse on school reform and in the urban charter school movement (Boo, 2004; Farmer-Hinton, 2011; King, 2004; Robinson-English, 2006). However, like the discourse on school reform, college-readiness—more specifically the preparation of Black students for college—is
fraught with complications and deficit ideologies. Historically, college-prep institutions have been limited to affluent white students (Armstrong, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Peshkin, 2001; Powell, 1996; Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2006), such that they were prepared to attend the most elite colleges in the country, which served to uphold and embody exclusionary schooling practices (Cookson & Persell, 1985; Farmer-Hinton, 2011; Peshkin, 2001; Powell, 1996). The college-readiness movement has propelled a trend to privatize public education, namely through the charter school movement. Farmer-Hinton (2011) explored how the “college for all” construct informs the processes of education within an urban charter school. In her longitudinal study, she identified the complications of college preparation through charter schools due to their organizational “adolescence,” which is fraught with the trials and errors of their incubation period. Thus, while touted as the best “choice” in urban communities that lack other viable options, charter schools’ “curriculum and formal structures are still in transition, which is unfortunate in a community where local parents want their children to be prepared for college” (p. 589). Pedroni (2007) points to the “conditional alliance” between African American communities and neoliberal and conservative proponents of the charter movement that emerges from the immediate need in many under-resourced communities, for schools that provide college access to students.

While there is little evidence that charter schools show better student performance than traditional public schools, many parents perceive charters to be a more viable option for their children, something May (2006) defined as the “perception gap,” i.e., the “variance between positive feelings and high academic achievement” (Almond, 2012, p. 357). Additionally, charter schools enroll a disproportionately high percentage of Black students.
In their study of charter school demographics, Frankenberg & Lee (2003) found that Black students attending charter schools experience more racial segregation than their public school counterparts. In terms of achievement, research on Black student performance in charter schools relative to their public school counterparts is inconclusive (Almond, 2012); some research has indicated they perform better (Abdulkadiroglu et al., 2009; Hoxby, Murarka, & Kang, 2009; Merseth, 2009), while others indicate they perform worse (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006b; Booker, Gill, Zimmer, & Sass, 2009), and still others show mixed results (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009; Zimmer & Buddin, 2005).

2.4 Identity as a Lens for Examining Schooling Processes

Given the role that ideology and discourse play in producing racialized meanings of student achievement, it is clear that racial identity is a significant consideration when unpacking the processes of schooling. Gee (2000-2001) discussed the ways in which identities are inherently tied to nature, institutions, discourse, and affinity-identity experiences. Sfard and Prusak (2005) found that using identity as a lens for studying learning practices of two different groups of students illuminates differences that cannot be attributed to external factors (e.g., teaching techniques) alone. In her study of Latino high school students, Flores-Gonzalez (2002) found that role identity theory provided a useful lens for explaining drop-out and retention rates. As such, identity provides a lens for understanding differential outcomes in learning (Guest & Schneider, 2003; Hoffman, 1998; McCarthey & Moje, 2002), and, consequently, it opens a space of inquiry illuminating the

An under-theorized and under-explored area of inquiry is the racial identity formation of adolescents (Branch, 1999; Sheets, 1995, 1999, 2000). Adolescents contend with issues of identity as a function of their psychological development (Erikson, 1968; Hemmings, 2006), and students of color contend with issues of racial identity as they grow into adults in a racialized society (Carter, 2005; Davidson, 1996; Hoffman, 1998; McCarthey & Moje, 2002; Nelson-Barber & Harrison, 1996; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1993). The immediacy of this work is clear. Tatum (1999) explored the phenomenon of racial segregation in racially diverse high schools:

As children enter adolescence, they begin to explore the question of identity, asking “Who am I? Who can I be?” in ways they have not done before. For black youths, asking “Who am I?” includes thinking about “Who am I ethnically? What does it mean to be black?” Why do black youths, in particular, think about themselves in terms of race? Because that is how the rest of the world thinks of them. Our self-perceptions are shaped by the messages we receive from those around us, and when young black men and women reach adolescence, the racial content of those messages intensifies. (p. 52) Understanding how students view themselves and how they negotiate an external gaze is instrumental in understanding what it means to be a student in a racialized society. Researchers are beginning to explore the critical intersection of self and environment, i.e., identity and socialization. According to Martin (2000, 2007, 2009a, 2009b), a racial hierarchy of mathematics ability constructs Black students as consistently underachieving
and white and Asian American students as consistently overachieving. My study, while not within the context of mathematics learning, examines how this racial hierarchy operates relative to the practices of college-readiness in which students and their teachers participate at an urban charter school. I hope to illustrate the ways in which this localized context instantiates racialized notions of college completion through ideologies, discourses, and practices and, furthermore, how students negotiate them. Examining educational disparities relative to race is not new; however, examining the common notions of race and achievement while simultaneously building more comprehensive models of socialization and identity is imperative to understanding learning processes and experiences of students. What needs further exploration is the process by which Black students come to learn and function in a college-bound institution given their localized contexts. In large urban cities, specifically, it is important to consider the political context of gentrification and urban school reform to fully understand the nature of teaching and learning within a school like Riverside College Prep.

The following sections outline the extant and relevant literature on (1) the various conceptual models of identity and identity development; (2) racial identity formation; (3) the socialization of Black youths as an important factor in psychological and academic development; and (4) socialization and identity relative to schooling practices and the various conceptualizations of the development of disciplinary identity.
2.5 Identity Formation: Sociocultural, Psychological, and Sociological Perspectives

In my work, I consider both socialization and identity as a lens for examining student achievement and academic growth. For example: What is the process by which students come to know themselves as students and, more importantly, as college-bound students? It is important to examine not only academic identity but also how this intersects with race and class. Drawing upon Martin’s (2000) multilevel framework for examining socialization and identity, I wish to look closely at socialization processes at the various levels—which I identify as institutional, departmental, classroom, and student—within Riverside College Prep.

Several models help me to examine identity and socialization at these various levels. Over the past few decades, theorists have emphasized the connection between cultural practices, learning, and identity formation (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Lee, 2007; Rogoff, 1990, 1993). As such, learning as a cultural practice is mutually constitutive with the concept of self: “Success and failure in school is contingent upon one’s ability to regulate and situate identities, utilize culturally-developed semiotic tools and negotiate models of meaning in shared social activity” (Lee & Majors, 2003, p. 49).

Lave and Wenger (1991) explored the notion of practice and learning and their relation to identity. Individuals engage in a community of practice and membership, meaning that practice is dependent upon the negotiation of learning within that community, shifting relationships to people and artifacts. As such, the practices within a community provide, constrain, and extend opportunities for learning and enacting particular identities. What cannot be ignored about the nature of self is the mutually constitutive nature of activity, context, and social interactions (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Majors, 2000; Martin, 2000; Nasir,
2000; Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Nasir, Jones, & McLaughlin, 2011; Wenger, 1991). It is important to note that all individuals within a community of practice do not have the same position or learning trajectory. These learning trajectories were identified by Lave and Wenger (1991) as peripheral, inbound, insider, boundary, and outbound trajectories. Over time, learning trajectories are enabled or constrained through membership, participation, and negotiation of practices.

Models of identity formation within sociology have tended to emphasize the hierarchical and tiered, but interacting, levels of identity and everyday exchanges. Identity is a function of social roles as they intersect with cultural institutions and social structures. The symbolic interactionist frameworks asserts that “society is seen as a mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships differentiated yet organized embedded in an array of groups, organizations, communities and institutions and intersected by crosscutting boundaries of class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, and other variables” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 285) As a consequence, individuals live in specialized networks embedded within larger social structures, and movement between these networks is contingent upon variables that affect mobility. Drawing upon this conceptualization, role identity theory posits that identity formation is a function of social positions, role enactment, and self-expectations (Biddle, 1986; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Goffman, 1959, 1963; Stryker & Statham, 1985; Markus & Kunda, 1986, Weigert, Teitge, & Teitge, 1986; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Central to role identity theory is the notion that enacting social roles helps to maintain and develop personal identity and that these social roles are related to the level of affective commitment one may have toward a particular identity (McCall & Simmons, 1966; Stryker, 1968).
Important concepts within role identity theory that I draw upon are role support, role stress, prominence, and salience. The hierarchy of identities necessitates a differentiation between prominence and salience. Prominence refers to the value of a particular identity, while salience refers to the number of times an individual enacts a particular identity. Role stress refers to the amount of psychological stress an individual incurs by enacting a particular role. Often, role stress leads to role exit. It is important to note that in order for a role to become durable across a span of time, it is imperative to find “role-identity partners who can be relied upon for dependable mutual exchanges of supports and rewards” (Thoits & Virshup, 1997). Within the context of schooling, a student needs to have other partners within his or her network who will reinforce “academic” roles that foster an academic identity. In other words, the role of “student” needs to be reinforced by others in order for that role to gain value as a viable part of an individual’s identity. As a particular role becomes more salient, it may become more prominent, given the right set of conditions. However, if one cannot successfully enact a role, it becomes less prominent in an individual’s life. Academic identities need to be substantiated by other identities and incorporated into everyday experiences in order to sustain a meaningful relationship to school context and settings (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002). Role identity provides a useful lens to examine socialization practices and how particular identities are either reinforced or dismissed.

While role identity theory and Wenger’s (1998) sociocultural theory are not incompatible, their utility in data analysis is different. Each affords me an opportunity to look at not only local but also distal contexts of teaching and learning. Sociocultural models of identity formation acknowledge the embedded nature of activities and the
institutional/societal values and norms that these activities encapsulate (Brofenbrenner, 1979, 1993, 1995; Cole, 1996; Engström, 2001; Gonzalez, 1999; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lerner, 1991; Nasir, 2000; Cote & Levine, 2002; Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Nasir & Hand, 2008; Rogoff, 1990, 1993; Spencer, 2006; Wenger, 1998). Role identity theory allows me to capture more granular records within the classroom, specifically *moment-to-moment* interactions in daily classroom practice, which in turn constitute the development of particular identities. At the classroom level, role identity theory is highly operational as a framework for looking at opportunities for identity enactment. At the institutional level, as I unpack the various trajectories of being a college-bound student across time, Wenger’s (1998) sociocultural theory is operational. I would like to illuminate, given the cumulative effects of discrete moments in the classroom (which are embedded in activities and bound to larger practices) and students’ interactions with adults, i.e., teachers and administrators, how the various trajectories (peripheral, inbound, outbound, and insider) are developed and negotiated within the school. This study requires a tiered analysis, and both these conceptual frameworks offer different analytical tools to unpack identity formation, socialization processes, and participation in a community relative to the ideas of college-bound practices and college-bound identity formation at Riverside.

### 2.5.1 Racial Identity Formation: What Do We Know and Why Is This Important?

Before I disentangle what identity development and socialization practices mean in a school setting, it is important to understand the complicated nature of *racial* identity development. Due to the historical marginalization of Blacks in America, racial identity formation is uniquely tied to societal values and ideas of personhood. To examine racial identity, many psychologists have used reference group therapy as a theoretical approach.
Accordingly, the most powerful influence on identity and self-concept is the reference group with which an individual identifies (Hyman, 1942; Leach & Smith, 2006; Merton, 1957; Suls & Wheeler, 2000). The reference group is the basis for one’s behavior, decision-making processes, and engagement with the world. A critical body of empirical and qualitative work in psychology and social psychology has elucidated the relationship between racial identity, racial socialization, and positive psychological and social outcomes (Banks & Banks, 1993; Cross, 1991; DuBois, 1973; Peters, 1985; Safyer, 1994; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Steele, 1992, 1997). Consequently, it is understood and assumed by some researchers that strong racial identity is related to positive attitudes and behaviors (Chavous et al., 2003; Harper & Tuckman, 2006; Oyserman, 2008, 2009; Sellers et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 2006), provides protective factors, and has a buffering effect from societal racism (Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001; Sellers et al., 2006; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Earlier studies focused on parents and communities as the resource for socialization and racial identity development (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Garmezy, 1985, 1991; Peters, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Safyer, 1994; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Stevenson, 1994). Later studies focused on the relationship between academic achievement and racial identity, both negative (Fordham, 1988, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Noguera, 2003; Osborne, 1995, 1997, 2001) and positive (Chavous et al., 2003; Oyserman et al., 2001). An emerging line of inquiry has moved away from these linear trajectories of racial identity and academic achievement by acknowledging the importance of localized practice, the fluidity of racial identity, and the complex nature of identity (Carter, 2005; Carter & Helms, 1988; Chavous et al., 2003;
Moving away from traditional and outdated notions of dichotomous racial identity, many researchers have conceptualized racial identity as a developmental trajectory. A seminal construct is Cross’s (1991) model of nigrescence. He delineates five stages of racial identity development: (1) pre-encounter (I have not had any racialized experiences); (2) encounter (why are people treating me this way?); (3) immersion/emersion (I have a strong sense of Black racial identity); (4) internalization (I am part of a larger network of individuals within and across racial lines); and (5) internalization-commitment (I know who I am and am comfortable with those around me). Other researchers have operationalized this model of Black racial identity development through psychometric instruments, most notably the racial identity attitude scale [RIAS] (Parham & Helms, 1981). In many cases, the link between attitude and various outcomes is measured; for example, attitude and academic achievement. What is not addressed in these tools is how an individual makes meaning of their own racial identity. While the RIAS is a tool that measures affective characteristics, the nature, quality, and complexity of those characteristics cannot be distilled. Some researchers have argued that a more complex and multidimensional approach to racial identity is needed to understand the linkages between identity and academic achievement (Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Nasir et al., 2011; Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Perry et al., 2004; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Shelton & Sellers, 2000).

In order to give more thoughtful and comprehensive consideration to racial identity, Sellers and his colleagues developed the multidimensional model of racial identity [MMRI] (Sellers et al., 1997; Sellers et al., 1998). This model serves to integrate more cognitive and
situational components into conceptions of racial identity development. The MMRI moves away from essentializing tendencies and acknowledges variations that exist within a group. As such, it considers cultural styles, communication, and sensibilities toward others and toward the world. The four dimensions of racial identity that the MMRI defines are salience, centrality, ideology, and regard. This model has been instrumental in explaining key variations in achievement within groups by emphasizing that racial identity is situational and dynamic (Erikson, 1968; Cross, 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Phinney, 1989) as well as contingent on individual belief systems (Boykin, 1986; Fordham, 1988; Ogbu, 1987; Steele, 1997).

2.5.2 Moving Beyond Deficit to Richness of Experience: Resilience

Given the complications of racial identity development for Black youths and the importance of socialization as an avenue for gaining a purchase on the world, it is important to consider and acknowledge their richness of experience. This literature review began with a discussion about the achievement gap and how this idea circumscribes understandings of Black students’ academic identities. Turning the idea of “at-risk” on its head, many researchers have explored how the present is a historical moment that has seen students propelled toward transcending economic, political, and cultural roadblocks. In focusing solely on how, why, and to what degree Black children are “failing,” it is easy to overlook their unique talents and the wealth of knowledge that they can contribute in both the classroom and in the world writ large. Given that many individuals succeed despite the predictive “at-risk” label, an emerging and robust body of literature has sought to examine resilience and factors that promote resilience (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Barbarin, 1993;
Braddock, 1991; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Freiberg, 1993; Garmezy, 1991; Howard, 1996; McAdoo, 1997; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998; Rutter, 1987; Spencer, Cole, DuPree, Glymph, & Pierre, 1993). Resilience can be loosely described as the ability to deal with and respond productively to adversity. It is the keen ability to cultivate strength and move “forward,” so to speak, despite obstacles. The three common attributes of resilience are hardship, buoyancy, and wellness (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996).

It is an ethical imperative to consider how students can and do consistently rise above risk factors, especially considering the dire consequences that “risk” entails regarding how children are categorized in school. The insistence by many policymakers of identifying poverty as the determining instance of risk produces harmful practices of tracking, stereotyping, and low expectations for students (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Jacob & Jordan, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992). It is therefore urgent that researchers develop and employ new models for examining Black student achievement (Perry et al., 2004).

In specific terms, the existing literature has identified risk factors that are structural in nature, e.g., socioeconomic status, two-parent households, and so forth. However, these risk factors privilege immanent qualities of white, middle-class culture, and at the same time do not acknowledge the collective history of struggle and access.

### 2.6 Identity, Socialization, and Academic Achievement

Thus far, I have explored the following: (1) how learning and identity intersect; (2) how racial identity formation is complicated for students of color, and how this formation is multidimensional and dynamic; (3) how socialization practices within the school and community create coping mechanisms for students, and why this may impact academic
growth; and (4) how other forms of resilience operate to support academic achievement and future success. Now how do these ideas operate in schools?

This section outlines the relevant literature on schooling as socialization, identity formation (race, class, and gender) at the intersection of academic practices, and institutional norms and practices. Studies on school-based socialization have focused on schooling as a racialized space (Barajas & Ronnkvist, 2007; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Nasir & Cooks, 2009) and how schooling practices produce varying outcomes for students based on race (Lee 2007; Lewis, 2003; Martin, 2000, 2007, 2008; Spencer 2006; Steele, 1997; Wright, 2009), class (Anyon, 1980, 1997; Apple, 1991, 1998, 2010; Weis, 1990; Willis 1977), and gender (Eder, Evans, & Parker, 1995; Gilligan, 1982; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Later studies have examined how these categories intersect and are interdependent (Bettie, 1995, 2000, 2002; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Luttrell, 1997; Nasir & Cooks, 2009). In unpacking all of this, there is a growing body of literature emphasizing academic identity formation relative to practice, disciplinary learning, and socialization (Berry, 2003, 2005; Martin, 2000, 2006; Nasir, 2000; O’Connor, 1999).

As aforementioned, the cultural-ecological model provided a new and distinct way of looking at student achievement that moved away from essentializing Black student achievement as innate and biological. According to Ogbu (2003), “cultural-ecological theory posits that school performance differences among minorities are primarily due to differences in the community forces of the minorities” (p. 46). Ogbu (1974, 1978, 1987, 2003) examined the underperformance of Black students and maintained that underachievement is the net result of attitudes and behaviors that are specific to non-immigrant African American communities. While Ogbu’s initial study in 1974 identified the
“glass ceiling” in the marketplace as an important factor in disengagement, the assumption today is that these obstacles have been removed. Furthermore, cultural attitudes and racial identity are posited as binary, and “Blackness” is somehow a continual conversation with “whiteness.” Moreover, Ogbu’s study did not acknowledge the inequity inherent in the structural norms or modern institutional practices as key informants in these behaviors and attitudes. Fordham (1996) extended Ogbu’s work with a clear distinction:

Ogbu’s approach emphasized social-structural and historical factors; it inscribed a cultural ecology. My approach emphasized expressive as well as adaptive responses to those determinants; it mapped a terrain of contest within African American culture as well as between it and the dominant culture. I proposed my theory as an addition to his, balancing its structuralism and extending its reach into the dynamics of African American adolescents’ cultural repertoire. (p.153)

In her study of Capital High, Fordham ascribed the underachievement of African American students as the burden of acting white.

Davidson’s (1996) seminal study on identity and schooling explored the nature of academic identity development within schools as a function of schooling practices. She identified school as a strong socializing institution (both intentional and unintentional) and as the nexus for racial and academic identity formation. Drawing upon Foucault’s (1981) ideas of power and how it affects individuals, Davidson argued that racial meanings, both institutional and individual, play a large role in how students situate themselves academically:

Identity can be conceptualized as a process that develops in a matrix of structuring social and institutional relationships and practices. Presentations of self, ranging from
resistance to assimilation, are linked not only to minority status and perceptions of labor market opportunities but also to disciplinary technologies, serious speech acts and other factors at the institutional level. (p. 5)

Because schools participate in negotiating the meanings that students attach to identity, the ways in which teachers and schools handle power and convey ethnically and racially relevant meanings become relevant to the conceptualization of student “behaviors.” Through the post-structural model of power and individual agency, Davidson described how power circumscribes identity; for example, a school’s discursive systems support speech acts that in many instances racialize students. Davidson identified five school-level factors that contributed to students’ sense of alienation, particularly among students of color: (1) patterns that emanate from academic tracking; (2) differential treatment of social groups; (3) bureaucratized relationships and practices; (4) negative expectations; and (5) barriers to information.

Drawing upon the notion that identities are “made and molded” in schools, current studies have explored school as a racialized space in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary contexts. In her case study of Latino high school students, Flores-Gonzalez (2002) found that racial assumptions mediate relationships and school practices. Teaching practices in school spaces also tend to privilege white culture (Skerrit & Hargreaves, 2008) while at the same time viewing race, class, and gender as mutually exclusive categories.

analysis considered class, at the intersection of race and gender, as she explored the contingencies that gave rise to her participants’ social mobility and their subjective perspective on mobility. Three key attitudes of upwardly mobile Mexican American girls are (1) their articulated experience of exceptionalism; (2) their participation in events and extracurricular activities; and (3) their early awareness of class distinction. Furthermore, upward mobility in Latino communities is not perceived as assimilation, but rather as an act of resistance (Gandara, 1995; Gonzalez, 1999; Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Another important intersection explored by researchers is that of academic engagement and racial identity. Carter (2005) identified three categories of students defined by how they draw meaning from their academic and racial identities: (1) cultural mainstreamers (assimilate to larger society); (2) cultural straddlers (maintain a strong cultural identity while utilizing mainstream cultural resources); and (3) noncompliant believers (uphold belief in achievement ideology but behave in an oppositional manner). Nasir’s (Nasir & Cooks, 2009) study at a predominantly African American high school reaffirmed the notion that academic identities and racial identity are mutually constitutive, fluid, and context-driven.

Of most relevance is the emerging literature on disciplinary identity and socialization. While my study focuses on academic identity relative to English Language Arts classroom practices, there is a critical mass of literature on math and literacy identity that provides a useful gateway for exploring academic identity relative to literacy practices in the classroom and the school at large. The next section examines discipline-based identity
formation relative to participation, cultural constructions of race, and academic achievement.

### 2.6.1 Academic Socialization and Disciplinary Identity


With respect to language, scholars have explored how language and literacy practices have drawn from white epistemologies. Smitherman & Baugh (2002) traced the scholarship on African American language and how the initial inquiry in the area of linguistics posited linguistic differences as evidence of the “intellectual inferiority” of Blacks—which served to establish white cultural and linguistic hegemony. Starting in the early ‘60s, a body of inquiry emerged in the field of linguistics that contested the extant perspectives on Black linguistic practices; it provided a theoretical framework to examine African American vernacular English, locating its development and use as a legitimate
practice (Abrahams, 1963; Labov, 1972; Smitherman, 1972). Smitherman's (1972) seminal work on African American English extended the inquiry from the examination of language structures to that of the sociocultural practices of language. Her work “clearly put to rest the notion of Black English being representative of cognitive deficiency” (DoBell, 2008, p. 159) to a broader audience.

Delpit (1998, 2006) deconstructed the “Ebonics debate” to lend clarifying meaning to how teaching and culturally relevant practices were being framed in education discourse. Language and literacy practices in the field of sociology were being critically examined not just as isolated learning, but as contextualized practices. Heath (1983) examined the rich literacy practices of communities, and her work opened avenues of inquiry in research that examined literacy as a social and cultural practice—practices that were not leveraged in schools. As a result, scholars have examined participation and the importance of meaningful participation as integral aspects of disciplinary learning (Delpit, 1998, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Martin, 2000; Moses & Cobb, 2001; Nasir & Cooks, 2009) that draw upon critical pedagogy and culturally relevant framework for teaching (Banks & Banks, 1993; Lee, 1993, 2005; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Drawing upon the earlier works of Smitherman (1972) and various sociolinguists, Lee (1995a, 1995b, 2001, 2007) provided a theoretical and pedagogical framework for teaching within the domain of English Language Arts known as Cultural Modeling, which drew upon the cultural and linguistic knowledge of Black students. Critical pedagogists have noted the importance of culturally relevant and academically rigorous curricula that cultivates critical engagement (Delpit, 1998; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Giroux, 1994; Stovall, 2006b; Tatum, 2009, 2011). These academic socialization practices call upon
students to critique knowledge and question established norms, while also gaining the requisite literacy skills that will provide access to the culture of power (Delpit, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001). Moje (2007) argues that, “[As] cultural beings, young people deserve to experience pedagogy and curricula that respond to and extend their cultural experiences” (p. 5). As such, culturally responsive practices in literacy learning consider students’ funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994), students’ linguistic and cultural knowledge (Lee, 1995a, 1995b, 2001; Lee & Majors, 2003), and the various discourses with which students routinely engage (Gee, 1996, 2000-2001). These areas of scholarship routinely have acknowledged that language, culture, and identities mediate the ways in which students learn.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, I provide a description of the research context and the plan of inquiry that I utilized for understanding both the academic experiences of a group of students within an AP English Language Arts class at Riverside College Prep, as well as the broader context of the school’s socializing mechanisms, namely its capacity as a charter school in a large urban city. The chapter begins with a description of the primary methods that I utilized for this study: critical ethnography and case study. I provide a brief overview of how I used each of these methods to collect data. Next I provide a description of the school and community context as well as the participants, data collection, and sources. I then provide an overview of my analysis; in particular, how I used CDA to analyze text and talk, and how I coded the data using this form of analysis. I end the chapter with a reflection on my stance as a researcher and how that may have shaped my plan of inquiry and interpretation of the data, citing both the strengths and the limitations of that stance.

3.1 Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnographies in education give focused attention to how values produce meanings, and inform interpretation of practices. Moving beyond just examining symbol systems that traditional ethnographies explore (Geertz, 1973), critical ethnographies further explore how symbol systems are embedded in broader historical and political frames (Carspecken, 1996). As I noted in Chapter 1, the prompts that guided my inquiry were:
(1) What are some of the most salient institutional discourses and ideologies of “college-readiness,” and how do they inform meanings, goals, and socialization practices at Riverside College Prep?

(2) What are some of the tensions, affordances, and constraints that emerge from the academic socialization practices at Riverside College Prep?

(3) What are some of the ways that teacher beliefs and dominant discourses inform socialization practices within the English department?

(4) How do students respond to and make meaning of the various socializing mechanisms in the classroom and at Riverside College Prep?

These guiding questions emerged from both my personal and my professional knowledge of the school. The purpose of raising these questions was not to seek definitive, self-contained answers, but rather to open avenues of exploration that illuminate socialization practices and identity development in the context of discourses, ideologies, and practices surrounding college-readiness.

Given my interest in examining schools as a function of both political and economic relationships as well as the meaning systems and processes that emerge within these institutions, critical ethnography provides a viable avenue for exploring schools as sites of ideological and discursive formation. Given the multilayered nature of schools, the various actors, the differential power relationships between them, and the cultural meanings within this context, critical ethnography allows me to study real-world settings and explore the experiences of individuals within that context (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 2004). In a critical ethnography of schooling practices and racialization in an elementary school, Lewis (2003) discussed how race is a salient factor in school interactions and in
taking the “colorblind” approach, as well as how teachers may respond in very racialized way toward students. Anyon (1980, 1981, 1997) and Willis (1977), through their seminal studies, also critiqued the ways in which market capitalism has served to create institutions that offer differential opportunities to students along racial and economic lines. What scholars have often pointed to are the ideological and discursive foundations that give rise to school practices. Through critical ethnography, it is possible to look at “differences” (racial, economic, cultural, etc.)—with all their ensuing implications—and how they are inscribed by ideologies.

3.2 Case Study

Case study method, much like ethnography, allows for in-depth examination of cultural phenomena and complex processes, thus serving as an effective supplement to the critical ethnography that frames this study. The purpose of case study research is to explore the meaning-making processes of individuals or “cases” in particular contexts (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Yin, 2008; Stake, 1995, 2000). As two areas of emphasis in my study are socialization and academic identity, a case study approach is useful in bringing to bear the interaction between individual and context (both local and distal), highlighting particular instantiations of larger phenomena.

I utilize case study method to more closely examine data at different levels. Case study is the most effective approach to explore the embedded contexts of school-, department-, and classroom-based socialization. First, I present the school as case because it is just one example where the processes of urban schooling unfold to uncover racialized discourses and ideologies concerning Black student achievement and learning. I also utilize the case
study approach to present data from individual students, allowing me to highlight student voice and agency. While much of my analysis examines the role of ideology and discourse in shaping socialization practices as well as the discursive construction of college-readiness and Black student identity by administrators and teachers, it is essential not to lose sight of how students enact their agency. In Chapter 6, I utilize a cross-case analysis to examine broader socialization and identity themes among 13 students in the AP English Language Arts class. The cross-case analysis provides snapshot of students’ conceptualizations of their own academic identities. In Chapter 7, I provide an in-depth case analysis of two students from the AP English Language Arts class.

3.3 Context for the Study

3.3.1 Community Context

The community of Riverside exists on the outskirts of the city center, in a neighborhood that still remains economically and racially segregated, under-resourced, and predominantly Black. The community has seen, like many other city neighborhoods, a shift in ethnic demographics since the migration of southern Blacks to northern cities. Riverside was once a thriving middle class community which moved to a steady decline between the 1950s and 1960s (Satter, 2009). This economic decline and racial segregation of the neighborhood was propelled by a series of policies namely, redlining by the Federal Housing Administration. This effectively prevented Black families from gaining access to credit or mortgages leaving them vulnerable to predatory lending policies. Simultaneously, White families were encouraged to leave and sell their houses to lenders, which were then resold to Black families at highly inflated prices and lending rates (Satter, 2009). These
unjust housing policies and a lack of access to loans led to development of segregated neighborhoods in major urban areas in an attempt to “manage” the influx of non-white minorities and to maintain separation of races (Drake & Cayton, 1945; Frazier, 1951; Franklin, 1979; Mohraz, 1979; Halpern, 1995; Hirsch, 1983; Lemann, 1991; Lipman, 2004; Mirel, 1993; Satter, 2009). Segregated neighborhoods, like that of the Riverside community, are not just a function of white flight or the conscious choice of minorities; rather, they arose through a process of legal and financial exploitation by the court and banking systems that worked in concert to uphold both policies that maintained segregation and financial servitude through unjust lending policies (Drake & Cayton, 1945; Franklin, 1979; Satter, 2009). Coupled with a shift in industry and rise in unemployment the neighborhood has seen a slow and steady economic decline (Frazier, 1951; Hirsch, 1983; Lipman, 2004; Mirel, 1993; Satter, 2009). As of summer 2013, the unemployment rate of 29.1% in the neighborhood of Riverside is significantly higher than the city. Service occupations have increased significantly and are comparatively higher than the city’s percentage. The leaders of the city’s school district, across the course of decades, have also taken measures to maintain both segregated and unequally resourced schools (Herrick, 1971; Lipman, 2004). Consequently, schools in the neighborhood have been historically under resourced, and the impact of this disinvestment has been overcrowding due to school closings, high teacher-student ratios, and lack of support for teachers (Lipman, 2004). Additionally, school reform within the district has put in place an accountability system which does not address lack of resources or systemic reform, but rather focuses on test scores and individual school accountability (Lipman, 2004). In light of this context, urban renewal in the neighborhood of Riverside through foundations and corporations are part the city’s larger neoliberal
agenda to revitalize the city and move towards privatization of schooling. Important to note as well is the presence of the business community in making key decisions around school governance and finances with respect to public schools as well supporting the agenda of privatization (Herrick, 1971; Shipps, 2006; Pedroni, 2007). Thus, the current reality for the residents of the Riverside community and their children is lack of both financial resources and access to effective schools. Notably, it is in this state that the need for schools that provide access to college arises.

3.3.2 School Context

Riverside College Prep, when considered within the context of the broader political economy of schooling, is an institution worth examining as a site of ideological and discursive formation. It is important to consider how the goal of college-readiness was framed, articulated, and practiced. The move to open Riverside College Preparatory Academy was one example of a larger commitment by a local family foundation to revitalize the community of Riverside. This notes a key shift in the function of schools, not as serving communities and the public good, but rather as a business venture—with charter schools serving a market. With the help of several multi-national corporations, the foundation opened Riverside College Prep as one of several projects to bolster the neighborhood, and, it can be argued, complicit in the larger neoliberal agenda to transform the city in an attempt to draw in more middle-class residents. Test scores are one of the key metrics that define “effective” schools and directly impact market value of homes and real estate value within the neighborhood. Thus, the motivation for creating effective schools is undergirded by market demands, not for the service of the community. The founding
members of the foundation sit on the board of directors at Riverside. Approximately 50% of the Board represent corporations (and corporate interests) ranging from real estate, technology, investment banking, futures trading, and insurance brokers. Given how this school came into being, the work of college preparation and the discourse on urban revitalization at Riverside College Prep is a concept worth unpacking. In a later section, I identify how these contexts inform my coding and analysis.

After being granted a charter by the city and local school district, Riverside College Prep opened in the late 1990s in a socioeconomically struggling neighborhood of a large, urban, Midwestern city—one that has seen significant growth in charters since the city launched a new wave of reform efforts in the late 1990s. Students who attended the school generally lived in the surrounding neighborhoods, and the school served a predominantly African American population. In the first four years of its operation, the school saw a 100% turnover of teachers in the English department. At the time of my study, during the 2010-2011 school year, all teachers in the English department had been at the school for at least three years. That school year, 882 students attended Riverside, with 94.7% coming from low-income households. Of those students, 16.1% earned scores that met or exceeded the overall score of the statewide standardized assessment—compared to 28.3% of students in the surrounding city school district. In the area of reading, 19.2% of Riverside students earned a score that met or exceeded the standard for their grade level in the statewide standardized assessment. In the 2010-2011 school year, the school did not make Adequate Yearly Progress.
3.3.3 AP English Language Arts Context

The Riverside English department—in particular, one AP English Language Arts classroom—was the targeted area of my study. As this was an English class, academic socialization relative to disciplinary literacy was an important consideration when examining classroom practices. It is also important to note that because this was an AP Language Arts class, the students in the class were broadly characterized by staff and teachers as being more academically engaged given they were in an advanced class. Students were programmed into the class based on teacher recommendations. A few of the considerations for being placed in Advanced Placement were the students’ desire to be in the class, their grades, and teacher judgment.

I initially made contact with the school administrators to discuss my study and gain permission to collect data at the site. Initial contact with the AP English Language Arts teacher was made following my meeting with school administration, and I asked permission to observe that teacher’s classroom as well as to discuss the area of focus of my study and my data collection methods with him and his students.

3.4 Recruitment and Selection of Participants

I recruited 23 participants for this study from Riverside College Prep. The participants were solicited by me through email or a personal meeting during the recruiting period of May of 2009 through October of 2009. The respondents were all staff or students from Riverside College Prep. The selection criteria included students who had been placed in the AP English Language Arts class that I had selected to study, teachers who were fully staffed
in the English department, and administrative staff at the school, such as the principal and the two co-founders of Riverside College Prep.

3.4.1 Students

I spoke to the students in the classroom and provided them with a brief overview of my study: what I was interested in examining, when I would be observing their classroom, and that I would be collecting both video and interview data. Student participants were made fully aware that if they agreed to be a part of the study, they would be video- and audio-recorded, and they would also potentially be asked to participate in a short interview of about 30 minutes as well as a more extended one- to one-and-a-half-hour interview. I provided all the students in the classroom with parental consent forms (for those who were under the age of 18) and student assent forms. Student participants were assured that their participation in the study would in no way impact their grade, and it was completely voluntary. If they were interested in participating in the study, they could at any time bring their signed consent forms to me or to their teacher. I also made them aware that my study would not directly impact the instruction that they were receiving. They were given the option of returning with consent forms if they wished to participate in the study. If they were not interested in participating in the study, I would try to the best of my ability not to include them in the video footage, and any analysis of my data from the video footage would not include them. I assured them that the video footage was not going to be seen by anyone but my academic advisor and myself, and that it was only going to be used to analyze my data and not made public. Issues of confidentiality were discussed as well, and though confidentiality was assured, anonymity was not, as I was collecting data in only
one classroom in the school. I changed all identifying information and stored personal
information in locked cabinets in my home. During interviews, students were assured that
they did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to or that made them feel
uncomfortable. They were also reassured that none of the information that they gave me
would be shared with their teacher or Riverside staff, and I reiterated that their responses
(as well as their participation in the study) would in no way impact their grade. I also
assured them that if they changed their mind about being in the study, I would not include
their interview data in my analysis.

The 13 student participants (3 male and 10 female) ranged in age from 17 to 19,
with a median age of 17. Of the 13 students in the classroom, nine had been in the honors
track since their sophomore year, and 12 had attended the school since the beginning of
their freshman year (see Table I, next page). As a reminder, all names and identifying
information has been changed to ensure the participants’ anonymity.
### Table I. Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of years at Riverside</th>
<th>Number of years in honors track</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine Thomas</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya Davis</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha James</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Benson</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Marcela Jackson</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison Williamson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.4.2 Administrators and Teachers

I recruited staff participants through email, which provided some information about my study, or through a personal meeting when I was at the site. I made staff members fully aware that they would be audio-recorded, and I asked them to sign an informed consent form to obtain permission to record the participants during their interview. Issues of confidentiality were discussed, and while confidentiality was assured, anonymity was not. I informed participants that I changed all identifying information and stored personal information in a locked cabinet in my home (see Table II, next page).
Table II. Staff Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Years at Riverside</th>
<th>Years of teaching experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edward Saint-John</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>President Co-founder</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken Grayson</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Chief Operating Officer Co-founder</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia Banks</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted O'Brien</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>English Teacher English Dept. Co-chair</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Bradshaw</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>English Teacher English Dept. Co-chair</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad Dunlay</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Writing Resource Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Reynolds</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Park</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Thompkins</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews, I assured the staff participants that they need not answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable. The participants, after acknowledging that confidentiality and risk procedures were explained, were asked to sign the consent forms or to bring the consent forms back to me later if they wished to participate in the study. A copy of this form was given to all participants for their records. This form explained how I would use and present the data, and it included contact information for my academic advisor and myself.
3.5 Data Collection

I collected data across multiple levels. It is important to note that, given the multilayered approach to data collection, these levels were not independent of each other but should be seen as embedded contexts. Each level or unit of analysis is important to consider as part of a complex tapestry that constituted Riverside College Prep. In some instances in my analysis, I point to how practices at one level served to inform, shape, or interact with another. For example, some ideologies at the institutional level were brought to bear at the departmental level, and they were then contested or negotiated at the classroom level. In other instances, ideologies or discourses were negotiated at the classroom and student levels, leaving the administration out of the loop.

Table III (next page) presents a high-level overview of the data collection and analysis at each level of the school.
### Guiding Prompts and Data Collection/Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Prompts</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Areas of Focus; Methods for Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the most salient institutional discourses and ideologies of</td>
<td><strong>Administrator Interviews</strong></td>
<td>- Coding across interviews and staff meetings for themes and trends (within and across levels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“college-readiness” that inform meanings, goals, and socialization practices at</td>
<td>Audio recordings</td>
<td>- Coding across artifacts for themes, trends, and major categories (within and across levels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside College Prep? (Institution)</td>
<td><strong>Teacher Interviews</strong></td>
<td>- CDA on teacher and staff discourse to identify what ideas, values, and beliefs about students,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio recordings</td>
<td>teaching, and learning (ideologies) were dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the tensions, affordsances, and constraints that emerge from</td>
<td><strong>Whole-School Staff Meetings</strong></td>
<td>- Analysis of themes and trends across categories and levels to identify socialization practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the academic socialization practices at Riverside? (Institution/Department)</td>
<td>Observational field notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the ways that teacher beliefs and dominant discourses inform</td>
<td><strong>Artifacts/Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>academic socialization practices at Riverside? (Department/Classroom)</td>
<td>Website/mission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-wide initiatives and programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional learning plan for teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do students respond to and make meaning of the various socializing</td>
<td><strong>Teacher interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mechanisms in the classroom and at Riverside by enacting, contesting, and</td>
<td>Audio recordings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negotiating practices and identities? (Classroom/Student)</td>
<td><strong>Department Meetings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observational field notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Artifacts/Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum initiatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Classroom observation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observational field notes, video recordings, audio recordings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Interviews with students</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio recordings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Guiding Prompts and Data Collection/Analysis
At the institutional level, I attempted to uncover the broad, school-wide discourses, ideological stances, and practices that culminated in socialization practices at the institutional level. As such, I interviewed key actors who had the power to inform practices at that level, specifically the president (co-founder), the chief operating officer (co-founder), the principal, and teachers in the English department. Through interviews, I hoped to gain insight on each participant’s beliefs about the profession, their motivations for working at Riverside, and their expectations for students at Riverside. I also attended school-wide staff meetings to examine broad discourses that were prominent in the school. Lastly, I examined artifacts such as curriculum documents, school website, Response to Intervention (RtI) policy documents, professional development plans and programs instituted at the school to gain a sense of how these practices aligned with belief systems, ideologies, and discourses that were prominent at the school level.

At the departmental level, I attempted to uncover how ideologies and discourses within the department gave rise to instructional practices. I interviewed teachers in the English department to gain insight on their beliefs about disciplinary and instructional practices, i.e., how they conceptualized what it meant to teach Riverside students. While interviews with English teachers are considered at the institutional level to gain insight on belief systems regarding teaching students at Riverside writ large, my focus at this level is primarily teachers’ beliefs about teaching students relative to instructional and disciplinary practices within the domain of English Language Arts. I observed four department and three school-wide teacher meetings to assess the prominent discourses surrounding instructional practices and student learning, as well as both the implicit and explicit learning goals that were laid out for the students. By examining artifacts such as curriculum
framework, grading policies, end of course exams and department policies, I attempted to uncover how instructional goals, both explicit and implicit, were implemented and practiced in light of teacher beliefs, ideologies, and discourses. Taken together, these sets of data provide a complex picture of socialization practices at the departmental level.

At the classroom and student levels, I examined how academic socialization practices were implemented in the AP English Arts classroom and how selected students made sense of those practices. I observed the classroom once a week throughout the course of one (2010-2011) academic year. Through classroom observations, I examined how academic socialization was instantiated through classroom practices, discourse, and student and teacher interactions. I also examined how students negotiated academic practices and school practices and how those experiences brought to bear the broader ideologies and discourses as well as the broader institutional socialization practices (culled from the institutional and departmental-level data). Through student interviews, I hoped to gain insight on how students made sense of their experiences in both the school and the classroom, as well as how they conceptualized their academic competencies and academic identities. My findings highlight how, in some instances, students resisted and contested the academic identities that were broadly constructed at the institutional level.

Interviews with all participants were audio recorded and then transcribed. Recording and transcribing the interview data allowed me to revisit the interview data more closely during my analysis. During both whole-school and department meetings, I collected my observations through field notes, and I captured classroom data using field notes as well as video recordings. I used audio recording to capture small-group
discussions, which I also transcribed. Additionally, I collected artifacts such as curriculum documents and information on school-wide programs and initiatives.

The use of video to capture classroom data was useful in allowing me repeated viewings as I analyzed the classroom data. Video was also useful in helping me to get a general sense of the classroom environment as well as allowing me to pay attention to particular students in the classroom. It also allowed me to observe both the practices in the classroom and how individual students, or groups of students, participated in those practices. Furthermore, I was able to observe not just participation but also academic behaviors, affect, and responses to classroom tasks that would not be evident through just an audio recording.

### 3.6 Analysis and Coding

As a complement to critical ethnography, I utilized CDA to examine discourses within and among staff, teachers, and students, as well as broader discourse inherent in artifacts, practices, and social interactions. CDA addresses social problems in discourse, both written and spoken, as an extension of power relations, acknowledging that words are not neutral and discourses are utilized to reflect, reify, and construct ideology within particular contexts (Fairclough, 1995; Luke, 1995-1996; Van Dijk, 2009). Through the use of CDA, the ways in which ideologies and institutions shape experiences and practices are made visible.

I utilized a grounded theory approach and constant coding to identify major discourse themes in the interview data as well as the field notes from staff meetings. The process of coding both the interview data and the field notes followed an iterative scheme, which led to emergent categories in the discourse. Initially, I looked for teacher and administrator responses that spoke to professional beliefs about education, students, or academic
socialization. After looking at these broad categories of responses, some themes emerged, namely: (1) schools as spaces of urban revitalization; (2) schools as spaces of student transformation; (3) teachers as primary change agents; (4) teaching as a spiritual and emotional act; (5) cultural deficits of students; (6) poverty as a roadblock to learning; and (7) lack of student resilience and motivation. There were several considerations that informed how I initially coded the data and identified themes. Given the historical context of the school system and the history of segregation, as well as the more immediate socio-political context of urban revitalization, renewal, and school reform, the context of the school was significant in informing my coding. In identifying discourse themes, I paid attention to language of revitalization and renewal, specifically how they may have framed school as a playing a significant role in revitalizing communities and having a transformative impact on students. Given the extant literature on missionary ideology and education as well as the deficit model of learning, these areas of scholarship were significant in identifying the discourse themes and how they tied to the two broader ideological orientations I identified, a decision I expand upon in Chapter 4. These categories from the interviews emerged in conjunction with the coding and analysis of the artifacts and programs at Riverside. Taken together, my analysis indicates that remediation was the dominant theme of academic socialization at the institutional level.

In my analysis of the departmental-level data, I examined teacher interviews, paying particular attention to responses that dealt with instructional practice, disciplinary practice, students, and learning. My coding and analysis of the departmental-level data was done immediately after I completed my analysis of the institutional-level data. Given that remediation is the broad institutional theme, I looked for instances of remediation in
departmental-level practices. Initially, upon reading the word “negotiation” in one teacher interview, and the frequency with which that word came up in that particular interview, I looked across my interview data, as well as in department programs and initiatives, to assess whether “negotiation” was a salient theme at the departmental level. By negotiation, I mean practices, policies, and procedures that are not stringent but that allow for flexibility. Upon looking at the curriculum initiatives and practices, as well as at other teacher interviews, I established negotiation as the dominant academic socialization practice at the departmental level. Given the dominant academic socialization themes at the institutional level and at the departmental level, I reviewed the interview data again to look for responses or themes that reflected particular identity characteristics of students. My analysis indicates three “academic identity” characteristics relative to resilience, responsibility, and knowledge of school practices that the school directly addressed—either through discourses, ideologies, or practices.

In my initial coding of the student interviews, I paid particular attention to the ways in which students made sense of their academic identities relative to the identity characteristics extrapolated through my analysis, namely resilience, responsibility, and knowledge of school practices. Chapter 6 offers a cross-case analysis of student responses relative to the institutional construction of identity that I outline in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 7, my analysis and coding of student data for the case studies pay particular attention to classroom practices and instances of remediation or negotiation, both in the classroom and in the experiences of students at the school.
CHAPTER 4
FRAMING COLLEGE-READINESS FOR BLACK STUDENTS: IDEOLOGIES, DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

“The number of people at Riverside holding degrees is, like, three percent. It’s really low, and it’s similar to the kids entering ninth grade. They’re graduating college by the time they’re 25, at 2 percent, which is horrifying. So our whole notion was to flip that upside-down. We knew that it would take a long time, but that’s my vision... The neighborhood is full of people from the neighborhood... The whole arc of their life is the exact same. You follow the arc of your parents, so our kids are ending the system of generational poverty that has been in the neighborhood. [They are] setting a whole new path for the neighborhood.”

- Ken Grayson, Chief Operating Officer at Riverside College Prep

When Edward Saint-John and Ken Grayson, the co-founders of Riverside College Prep, opened the doors to their charter school in 1998, they were committed to “breaking the cycle of poverty” (K. Grayson, personal communication, September 17, 2010) that flourished among local tensions in the community. However, three factors—the emergence of a charter school in the wake of neighborhood school closings, higher accountability with no added support, and less choice—served as signifiers of all the things that had gone wrong in a school system that was already crumbling and that had a long history of underserving Black children. When I interviewed Ken Grayson to discuss the history of the school, he identified urban revitalization as the heart of his work at Riverside College Prep. That is, his focus was the students from the community who would leave to attend college but eventually return to become the change agents in the community. The focus on revitalization and the language of revitalization at Riverside is significant in that it reflects a particular position on privatization and school reform. Specifically, it reveals that schools do not function to serve the community or act in the service of social justice or the public
good, but rather to serve the broader interests of the marketplace. Privatization, specifically, is part of the move towards raising test scores and raising property values.

4.1 The Riverside College Prep Mission

For the founders of Riverside College Prep, the creation of the school was an instantiation of social justice, an opportunity to subvert the arc of poverty in the lives of its primarily Black students. The goal was not only to support students getting into college, but also to see them successfully complete their post-secondary education. While the goal of all secondary institutions is to create a pathway to college, it is important to consider the explicitness of this goal at Riverside: “The mission of Riverside College Preparatory Charter High School is to prepare young people from under-resourced communities for graduation from high school with the academic skills and personal resilience necessary for successful completion of college.”

While the founders saw the goals of the Riverside mission as essential for allowing students full and intentional participation in society, it is worth considering the mission statement of this high school, attended mainly by poor Black students, in relation to other high schools. My youngest brother graduated from an elite high school located within 50 miles of Riverside. The mission of that school, as it still stands in 2013, is “To commit Minds to Inquiry, Hearts to Compassion, and lives to the service of Humanity.” Nearly two decades ago, I graduated from a high school that was similar in constitution to my brother’s. The mission of my high school was, “To enable students to become responsible citizens in a changing, global society.” The percentage of Black students in my brother’s school was 0.8%; in my school, the percentage was 10.4% (serving approximately 3,200 and 2100
students, respectively). Both schools were, and remain, well-resourced, and they have long histories of sending students to college. However, rather than being explicit about attending college, there was an implicit understanding in each school that all students would do so. The small percentage of high school graduates of these two schools not attending college were expected to maintain their middle-class status through alternative career routes.

Rather than a singular focus on attending college, my high school education, and that of my brother and our peers, was designed to prepare us for meaningful participation in society, to exercise our individual and collective agency, and to allow us to take our rightful places in a larger global world. As a prerequisite to participating in this academic socialization process, rather than trying to change us, our teachers engaged with us in ways that indicated that they valued who we already were and where we came from. The mission of our schools was not to take us out of our communities as a first step toward changing those communities. In fact, we were expected to move within a predictable trajectory of college and work, thus reifying the paradigms of our community.

In contrast, the students at Riverside College Prep were promised successful completion of college; but there were a number of contingencies related to this promise. First and foremost was the fact that “revitalization” undergirded this promise. Consequently, the distinct purpose of the school, however implicit, was to change communities and culture and by design modify how students situated themselves in the community. Moreover, there were a number of assumptions about the students embedded in this mission and its promise. The one that resonated most loudly was the notion that Black students needed to reorient themselves in order to succeed in college. Implicit in the
mission was that “breaking away” from community and culture was the first step toward the path to post-secondary education. Thus, college-readiness meant shifting identities.

Although this comparison of missions is not exhaustive, it hints at deep-seated assumptions about what it often means to educate Black students in urban schools and within districts that continue to struggle to provide quality education to these students. In the affluent suburbs, attending and graduating from high school often means that attending college or other meaningful postsecondary options are normalized as a part of post-secondary plans. In contrast, to be a school committed to college-readiness in an urban Black community speaks volumes about the assumptions of and expectations for its students.

What were the underlying assumptions of the college-readiness mission of Riverside College Prep? And what do these assumptions reveal about the administrators’ expectations regarding what students need to know and what they already know? In this chapter, I answer these questions by unpacking how the administration at Riverside College Prep conceptualized its mission and the notions of transformation and remediation in the context of the school’s college-bound ideologies, discourses, goals, and practices. These ideologies and discourses reflected racialized assumptions of students at Riverside and the function of the teachers and staff. These ideologically framed discourses informed practices that served as socializing mechanisms for students. I will demonstrate that locating the school as a site of transformation and social change, in turn, characterizes Black communities as spaces of chaos and familial disrepair. Because of this, Riverside’s work of transforming students was actualized through practices of remediation that emphasized growth, privileging incremental progress over mastery of skills. As perceived
by many of the staff, the school served not only as a site of academic achievement, but also as a site of social revitalization and change. I will also demonstrate that the school provided unique opportunities and supports for students as part of the discourse and practice of college-readiness. But these opportunities and supports may have been uneven in their real impact on actual success in college. Figure 4.1 (below) represents my theoretical frame of ideology, discourse, and practice, illustrating how they constituted the internal tapestry of socialization at Riverside. It is important to note that, given the ideological and discursive frames at the school, socio-emotional socialization was privileged over academic socialization.
In many ways, Riverside College Prep was a privileged space. Students sensed that teachers were involved and invested in their learning. Teachers felt like they were doing important work. The administration held that they were invested in the greater good and the betterment of the community. What did this mean in terms of the school’s official discourse and underlying ideologies? My analysis of interviews with the principal, the chief operations officer, the superintendent, and various teachers provides insight on how school leaders and teachers articulated the mission of Riverside, what it means to learn, what it means to teach, and how those meanings, goals, and priorities play out for Black students.

4.2 Missionary and Deficit Ideologies

In my analysis of the institutional-level data, discourses emerge that are framed by two distinct ideological orientations: a *missionary* ideology and a *deficit* ideology. The missionary ideology was mediated through the dominant teacher and staff discourse themes of (1) schools as spaces of urban revitalization; (2) schools as spaces of student transformation; (3) teachers as primary change agents; and (4) teaching as a spiritual and emotional act. Deficit ideologies surfaced in discourse that focused on (1) cultural deficits of student; (2) poverty as a roadblock to learning; and (3) lack of student resilience and motivation (see Table IV, next page).
Separately, these two ideologies speak to both the function of the school/teacher and the construction of Black students. At the intersection of these two ideologies is the conceptualization of what it means to teach Black students, i.e., academic socialization. At Riverside, this intersection invoked a prevailing discourse of academic socialization practices, namely that socio-emotional socialization was integral to supporting students in becoming college-ready. In contrast, the spaces of silence in the institutional discourse included (1) the community and family resources that administrators and the school community could draw upon; (2) the intellectual and emotional resilience of students; and (3) the students as the primary change agents in their own learning and growth.

The missionary and deficit ideologies and the resulting discourses were further reflected in a myriad of practices at Riverside. The hiring practices (for teachers and principals) aligned to missionary ideologies of teaching and reinforced deficit ideologies of students. The various support services, such as Social and Behavioral Intervention, Minority Mentorship Brotherhood, Daily Harmony, and Rising Stars, were instituted to address and compensate for perceived cultural and behavioral deficits. The broad
curriculum practices of the growth model served to address the perceived intellectual and emotional deficits of students. This broad set of practices in the school indicates a defined institutional practice of diagnosis, treatment, and *remediation* (see Figure 4.2, below).

![Figure 4.2. Missionary ideologies and discourses.](image)

Martin (2007) identified the missionary orientation within education practice and discourse as “a conceptualization of teachers who must save African American children from themselves and their culture” (p. 13). This conceptualization implicates teachers and
school personnel as agents of change who serve to compensate for students’ cultural and intellectual deficits while at the same time helping to transform students and communities. These formulations of teacher, student, and community are actualized in the discourse surrounding the role of the school as a space of urban revitalization and student transformation, of the teachers as the primary change agents, and of teaching as an emotional and spiritual act. It is worth noting that teachers for the most part, had positive attitudes towards their students and were invested in student growth. These positive attitudes are revealed in an emotional investment teachers had with students and their desire to provide a pathway to college. Teachers revealed an investment in student growth through the discourse in staff meetings on student work and skill enhancement. Like the missionary schools in the South, in which individuals worked toward development and progress during Reconstruction but the work was complicated by the agenda of Northern industrialists and individual missionaries’ own sense of self, teachers at Riverside in enacting a neo-“missionary” stance had positive intent complicated by broader political agendas and problematic assumptions about Black communities. Riverside College Prep as a charter school, is complicit in the broader movement of educational privatization. The individual actors, much like many missionaries, had very noble intentions of supporting the community and the students of Riverside, these assumptions were undergirded by deficit beliefs about Riverside students with respect to their resilience and self-efficacy.
4.2.1 The Missionary Ideology in Action

This chapter’s opening quotation from Ken Grayson, the Chief Operating Officer and co-founder of Riverside, speaks to his prevailing belief that schools are the necessary component to changing neighborhoods and revitalizing communities. His words express the undergirding assumption that implicates schools/teachers and students/communities in a differential power relationship: Schools exist to effect change within communities and not as a way to serve communities or work in concert with them. In effect, the staff and school act as a civilizing influence for students in the Riverside community. This orientation was echoed by Edward Saint-John, the president and co-founder of Riverside. I asked Saint-John about his motivations for opening Riverside, and he spoke about his belief in the primary function of the school:

We understood the school to be a rigorous social service arm. It’s really a school founded by social workers, not a school founded by educators. I was at the point in my life where you want to identify an acre and want to plow it. You want to stand [alongside] your own creation. (personal communication, September 2, 2010)

Saint-John characterized his work at Riverside as a social service project, and he located the work of schools as addressing the inherent deficits of the community. Doing so may have inevitably involved a de-emphasis of academic and intellectual preparation. Additionally, in identifying the school as part and parcel of his “creation,” Saint-John privileged his subjectivity and inflected a paternalistic attitude toward students and the community he served.

Tied to the belief that schools are spaces of transformation and revitalization is the ensuing belief that schools serve to address student deficits, i.e., the work of the school is to
transform students. In fact, Saint-John articulated the mission of his school as “to take all kids and understand that they all have capacity and embrace the ones that are the most wrecked” (personal communication, September 2, 2010). In further specifying how he conceptualized the ideal Riverside student, his interview responses indicate how the school functioned to transform students and create essential shifts in students’ thinking, behaviors, and academic practices:

I just don’t like the notion of an ideal student. I like [who] students...are when they come in. Obviously I could describe someone who sounds like Harry Potter. You know they are intellectually confident, they are curious, they have good work habits, good organization, doing homework; so much depends on showing up, being prepared for class. They really understand the place is peaceful, and they are part of the contributors of peace, but...these students in some ways don’t exist. I really liken the kids who come in freshman year as hot messes...That to me is the ideal student because then [you've] got this wonderful campus, and by senior year, you look forward to knowing them as young adults [because] they become these terrific humans. I think that is our school’s sweet spot. We like the hot messes. (personal communication, September 2, 2010)

In defining the ideal practices of a student who completed their matriculation at Riverside, Saint-John identified the areas that needed to be addressed. Furthermore, the school as an institution was responsible for transforming children from “hot messes” into “terrific humans.”

While Saint-John attributed the transformation of Riverside students to the school’s socializing mechanisms – which speaks to the first two assumptions of the missionary ideology, that school is a space of urban revitalization and one of student transformation –
the other key component is the teacher, who at Riverside was considered the primary change agent and whose profession was defined as a spiritual and emotional act. This understanding of teacher practice is reflected in how teachers understand their practice and profession. The prevailing attitude among Riverside’s teachers was that teaching is a political act and an instantiation of social justice; and in enacting their professional roles in this space and at this time and with these students, they were working to disrupt the historical and material realities that their students faced. This particular conceptualization of teaching privileges teacher subjectivity and de-emphasizes student agency as well as the students’ intellectual and cultural resources. This particular instantiation of missionary ideology constructs students as not just participants in the transformation, but willing and grateful receptors of these laudable goals and intentions. For many teachers, teaching at a school like Riverside is part of their personal and professional investment in social justice. Teaching in underserved communities is considered instrumental in breaking the cycle of poverty and providing tools and opportunities for students in poor communities to go to college and eventually gain social mobility. Ted O’Brien, the Riverside English co-department chair, reflected on his decision to teach at Riverside after teaching in more affluent schools:

The mission of Riverside, to me, is the transformative mission of our society. Lots of schools are sort of like cul-de-sacs...students go there, but they don’t end up going anywhere from there. But to be a college prep school in a neighborhood with similar demographics to Riverside is, to me, one of the most helpful things an educator can do. (personal communication, October 29, 2010)
This sensibility was also echoed by O’Brien’s fellow English department chair, Steve Bradshaw, who spoke of his work not only as a political act but also as necessary given the pre-conditions of his students:

What I really like, what was an important aspect of teaching and education, is that it’s something meaningful to do, sort of the social justice aspect of teaching as a political act. I have this skill set, and what do I want to do with it? I want to be in a classroom where I can help sort of empower students to succeed in college and in their future lives. I saw this as an important part of my job, helping students. I think the most important part of my work is preparing students for college success. Especially here, preparing students who have been under-served and come from a neighborhood which is a marginalized neighborhood. A lot of them come from backgrounds that are not as advantaged as the majority of the country. They have some real challenges. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

O’Brien’s and Bradshaw’s conceptualization of teaching and their role as teachers illustrates a missionary stance on teaching practice in that they aimed to overturn material circumstances of students and save them from their presumed fate as poor, Black students. As such, teaching at Riverside was conceptualized as an act of giving voice to and empowering students.

The instantiation of a missionary orientation was reflected in Riverside teachers’ and administrators’ belief that teaching is an emotional act. This sensibility in and of itself is not unique to a missionary ideology, but its prominence in the discourse and the absence of a complementary discourse around intellectual and critical engagement of students lent itself to an interpretation that advantaged the emotional approach. Brad Dunlay, an English
teacher at Riverside, spoke of the importance of emotional engagement in his role as a teacher:

Ansari: What do your students need?

Dunlay: I think my kids need love. I think they need tough love. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

In fact, Dunlay thought that building relationships with his students was paramount, but he recognized the shortcomings:

I think the most important part of my work is to build relationships with students, but more than that, to encourage students and make them feel like they are worthwhile. Not just intellectually, but just that someone out there likes them. And I am not always able to do that, to convey that idea—to make school a comfortable place for them. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

Similarly, Jane Park, an English teacher at Riverside, spoke of the importance of building strong connections with and cultivating the identities of her students at Riverside:

Ansari: What do you think your students need?

Park: They need someone, someone to connect the dots. When I was in high school, I just wanted someone to tell me who I was. I had this consistent identity crisis throughout my life. I’m good at this, bad at this; what does it mean? I see my students reaching out for something to identify themselves with, and those can sometimes be positive things and those can sometimes be negative things. And I see Ted [O’Brien, the department chair] having one-on-one conversations with students, really helping them investigate the goodness in themselves, helping them find the hope for their own well-
being that sometimes they might have thought was already gone. (personal communication, November 3, 2010)

Park perceived the most important part of her teaching career as working to build “hope” in her students. It is important to consider when analyzing Park’s conception of her own practice that for her, building relationships took precedence over building academic dispositions. Additionally, the importance of building hope and helping students find the “goodness in themselves” (something she characterized broadly as a need for many of her students) rested on assumptions about her students’ resilience. Specifically, she assumed that her students did not see their own “goodness.” Furthermore, the importance of helping students navigate both “positive” and “negative” aspects of their identities also rested on her own assumptions about what her students were dealing with, as well as a broader assumption that they needed support from their teachers to navigate the choices that they would make in their lives outside of academics. The language of “hope” and “goodness” illuminates a perceived need to save students from themselves and from making the wrong choices. It also illuminates how Park positioned herself in relation to her students: In order to effectively teach her students, she had to enact a missionary stance. In doing so, her responses indicate that she did not perceive her students as agents, but rather as helpless and in need of her guidance and emotional support.

On a broader level, Ken Grayson, a member of Riverside’s senior leadership, spoke of the importance of building strong relationships with students, which he described as more urgent for these particular teachers and administrators working with these particular students than for staff and students in traditional public schools:
I think it is universal, [but] I think it’s magnified at Riverside, that kids need to have relationships with adults who they know care about them and see a bright future for them, because so many kids come into the door not having healthy relationships with an adult and not having any expectations for their future. And if they do, they aren’t really good expectations. And so for a lot of kids, that is critically important, and I think we’ve done really well in that area. (personal communication, September 17, 2010)

It is important to note that, according to Grayson, Dunlay, and Park, the work of building strong foundational relationships with the students at Riverside was the most urgent matter, and it reflected a strong perception that their work was tied to saving children.

4.2.2 The Deficit Ideology in Action

A missionary ideology is fueled and reinforced by the deficit ideology relative to students’ cultures, experiences, and engagement in learning. While the missionary orientation defines the uneven relationships between school/community, school/student, and student/teachers, the deficit orientation is indicative of how teachers and administrators make meaning of those relationships and how students and communities are constructed. As a review, these deficit ideologies are illuminated in the discourse concerning (1) cultural deficits of students; (2) poverty as a roadblock to learning; and (3) student resilience and motivation.

Teachers and administrators at Riverside perceived a primary aspect of teaching their students to be addressing the mitigating circumstances that the students brought to bear in the school and in the classroom. As such, addressing student experiences and overturning negative experiences was seen as critical to helping students become college-bound.
Dunlay spoke of the ways in which Riverside strove to address the needs of students informed by an understanding of students’ cultural deficits:

Ansari: What is the mission, as you perceive it?

Dunlay: I think the mission they promote is to get students from under-resourced neighborhoods into college. And I do believe that that is the work that goes toward that, but I think the day-to-day nitty-gritty is so much messier, because their lives are chaotic and they bring that chaos into the building. I guess my perception of that mission is to help these kids with something more positive than what they are experiencing either at home or in other schools they might have gone to. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

Bradshaw referenced the “real challenges” students faced that could potentially impede their progress toward college. In fact, these deficit ideologies were echoed throughout the administrators’ understanding of the mission of the school as a transformative space and in their emphasis on building relationships with students. The latter speaks to how Riverside students may have been perceived as lacking emotional connections at home in regard to “healthy relationships” with adults. In this understanding, schools function to model “family” relationships. Dunlay reflected on his interpretation of Riverside’s approach to students and the socializing mechanisms therein invoked:

I think for better and for worse, Riverside’s approach is sort of like a family approach. So the solution is sort of like love. A lot of times that is what our students need. But sometimes they don’t need love; sometimes they need something that is institutionalized, structured. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)
Dunlay alluded to the problematic issues that arise from this approach to learning, which may not provide enough disciplinary structure. Dunlay problematized the fact that the school intentionally focused on love and how deficit ideologies mediate practices that privilege relationships, love, and nurture. I expand and address this idea in further detail in Chapter 5.

The deficit discourse invokes poverty as a significant roadblock to student learning and the resulting academic success. In fact, the missionary stance on teaching is buttressed by the belief that poverty is a significant factor in academic success and failure of students. For O'Brien, poverty informed student motivation and self-efficacy:

I think [academic failure] is one byproduct of poverty. One of the messages that poverty seems to send even the most unsuspecting young person is that you do not have self-efficacy, you do not have the ability to pull yourself up. This society— these socioeconomic, racial forces behind society are not going to allow you to get where you need to go. And that imbues how they understand their own cognitive self-efficacy.

(personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Most importantly, the perceived connection between poverty and self-efficacy fuels understandings and discourses concerning student resilience, motivation, and academic engagement. Saint-John held strongly to the belief that Riverside was a place that helped to transform students to be “intellectually confident.” This transformation, fueled by socialization practices at the school, served to put students on the path to college. Implicit in his idea of the function of school was that the students were not resilient:

You know, one of the teachers said, “You know our kids are as bright as the kids at better schools, but their confidence in their intellect is very shallow. You can’t shut up
those kids [at other schools]; they got an opinion...and they are confident, and that is not true of our kids,” and I agree. Because a lot of times, kids come in having pretty much convinced themselves that they are not college-bound and [that] they are not very smart. (personal communication, September 2, 2010)

The work of building intellectually confident learners was perceived as a unique need affecting Riverside students. This perception was echoed by the principal, Cynthia Banks, who spoke of the need to nurture resilience because students identified themselves as academically unsuccessful:

Overall the scores tend to be low, and at this point [the] school is being judged by [the students’] test scores, so they are deemed unsuccessful. Then the kids now know, “I go to an unsuccessful school. I’m going to an under-performing school. We must not be very smart. Black kids aren’t very smart because all under-performing schools happen to be predominantly Black schools.” The kids associate themselves with failure.

(personal communication, September 24, 2010)

These discursive practices of deficit framed teachers’ and administrators’ understandings about students as having cultural, emotional, and material deficits that informed their academic identities and their intellectual engagement with school. Specifically, students were seen as lacking the resilience to confront tasks and tackle academic challenges. The missionary ideology framed teachers as agents of change, but this did not acknowledge students’ ability to contest, resist, and negotiate relationships and practices.
4.3 Academic Socialization: Resilience as the Primary Pathway to College-Readiness

At the intersection of these two ideological orientations, there emerges an institutional understanding of academic socialization for these students at this historical moment. In actualizing a missionary stance, teachers and administrators perceived themselves as providing the socializing mechanisms to effect change and student growth. Deficit ideologies inform constructions of students as lacking motivation, resilience, and intellectual resolve. These formulations inform the beliefs (and ensuing practices) that academic engagement and intellectual growth are contingent on building students’ self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience. Consequently, this goal is pursued by providing emotional support for the students and by emphasizing growth as an important step in orienting them toward learning and achievement. This notion of growth is specific to the teachers’ and administrators’ understanding of students as having deficits, both emotional and academic, because of their cultural, familial, and economic backgrounds. Figure 4.3 (next page) represents the academic socialization processes at Riverside.
The privileged academic socializing mechanism at Riverside was to provide emotional support to students. Ted O’Brien, one of the English department chairs, spoke of the importance of this socializing mechanism as he reflected on the motivation of his students:

I tend to think of the ideal Riverside student, which is less about cognitive functioning and more about sort of social, psychological, psychosocial dynamic, and I tend to think of that metaphorically. And so what I think of is a really thin membrane, imagine it to be sort of gelatinous membrane, and here’s a student in a space of...cognitive self-confidence around any sort of cognitive task in the classroom. [The] teacher amps up
the cognitive difficulty, and all of a sudden the student goes through that membrane to lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy. “I can't do this, it's hard.” And you see a lot of that freshman year; their heads are down at their desks, they are acting out. “This is too much.” And I tend to think of that as the difference between a student here and a student at a better-resourced school. These students are so much more willing to give in to that, “I can't do it.” (personal communication, October 29, 2010)

O’Brien characterized his students in contrast to other students at different institutions with different missions, and this construction was a racialized understanding of Riverside students. These understandings are framed as “racialized” because O’Brien noted key differences in the types of support that his students needed as compared to what his former students needed—in a school where the majority of students were middle class and the largest population of the students were white. While two key differences between O’Brien’s two primary teaching experiences were the racial and economic make up of his students, he offered up race-neutral language. Bonilla-Silva (2009) referred to this semantic move as the “anything but race” strategy, in which the speaker discusses assumptions about minorities but offers up no explicit reference to race. This construction foregrounds student deficits by identifying them as unwilling, unmotivated, and emotionally fragile learners. The underlying assumption of Riverside’s teachers and administrators was that a given student entered Riverside as an unmotivated learner. In practice, this translated to the emphasis of emotional support as a necessary precursor to teaching the students. As such, administrators perceived the work of teachers as building up students’ academic self-efficacy by helping them to link achievement to effort and not to innate ability, a mission that Principal Banks articulated as such: “One of the things we try
to get our teachers to understand is that teenagers need to be held accountable, but they also need to feel some success” (personal communication, September 24, 2010).

An integral element of this work on academic socialization was to foreground growth as a function of academic achievement. The administration viewed growth as a key component in conceptualizing pedagogical practices. Moreover, this attitude toward growth was perceived as contingent on a teacher’s relationship with his or her students:

Yeah, you have to love kids. You have to have that growth approach, that notion that kids are going to grow over time, that’s our whole function, and you have that long-term view that kids aren’t good right now but you are going to keep making gains, you are going to be consistent, and you are going to be who you are. (E. Saint-John, personal communication, September 2, 2010)

This predominant notion of the importance of growth not only speaks to helping students progress, but also uniquely links to notions of student deficits: Because students are characterized as unwilling and emotionally fragile learners, teachers need to help students understand that they are academically competent. A possible implication for this in classroom practice is that growth is tied to incremental progress and not to mastery of skills. Banks spoke of the prevailing notion that the students needed intervention, and she emphasized growth as a way of addressing perceived student deficits: “In high school, the perception is kids are supposed to come with a certain level of readiness, and you just teach for that level of readiness. We have to get past that. We need to talk about growth” (personal communication, September 24, 2010). A possible implication of this emphasis on growth is that students were not given opportunities to accelerate the pace of their
learning, because the students were assumed to need intervention and opportunities to see themselves as academically and intellectually competent.

Another key reason that this notion of growth was over-emphasized is the high failure rates in the school. Saint-John reiterated the importance of Riverside's approach to teaching and evaluating students in the context of the school’s previous failures:

I think it was three, four years ago, we had a number of teachers that had these extraordinarily high failure rates, and it was just a matter of, “Here’s the syllabus, this is what you gotta turn in, this is the percentage of the grade, and your performance is determined on these deals.” And it was just awful, and it just offended our notion of how kids learn and grow and the mission of the school, which is about preparation, scaffolded for completion of college. So we did a lot of reading [on] the fallacy of F’s, and philosophically, we just came around to it. A kid should not be told they can’t pass, especially kids who have a self-understanding of their intellectual capacity as being sort of fragile and transitory. So how do you go to a model where you say, “Failure is not an option, and it is the job of the teacher to grow students over time”? It’s a growth approach. (personal communication, September 2, 2010)

Saint-John perceived the growth approach toward student grades as essential to addressing the perceived fragility of students’ intellectual competence. In short, he and Riverside’s other administrators decided that their students did not have the resilience to experience failing grades.

It is important to note that this discourse on growth was circumscribed by ideologies that do not position students as intellectually motivated and competent. Moreover, this
may have led to diminished opportunities for students to engage in rigorous tasks, to gain mastery, and to be held to common expectations of a college-bound student.

4.4 Hiring Practices as Ideological Instantiations

The previous sections highlighted how the prominent missionary and deficit ideologies operated within the various discourses at Riverside and gave rise to understandings about academic socialization (at the level of discourse). These central ideologies also informed hiring practices, and the dispositions and attitudes that the school leaders and principal sought in their employees further reinforced the dominant ideologies operating at Riverside. These dispositions were flexibility, emotional responsiveness, desire to effect change, and a belief in growth, which are unique indicators informed by the missionary and deficit ideologies. In fact, these discursive themes pay particular attention to four elements of the school’s ideologies: (1) poverty as a roadblock to learning; (2) teachers and principals as agents of change; (3) emotional engagement of teachers; and (4) growth as an indicator of academic achievement.

Saint-John looked for particular belief systems when hiring principals, and these belief systems reflected the discursive emphasis on poverty and learning. The dominant discourse on poverty and learning was foregrounded in the prevailing emphasis on the idea that “all students can learn.” In Saint-John’s words, “I think job number one [of a principal] would be believing that poor students of color who come from bad situations can graduate from college” (personal communication, September 2, 2010). This implies an underwritten counter-assumption that some students can’t learn or graduate from college. So the concept is codified with racial meanings and understandings of Black students. Saint-John
foregrounded this emphasis on poverty and student deficit and in some ways circumscribed the conversation around teaching and learning at Riverside, a concept I develop further in Chapter 5.

Saint-John also held that helping students who live below the poverty level to learn and achieve academic success is part of a larger role of schools, principals, and teachers, whose job is to remediate students and act as agents of change. These dispositions foreground teachers and principals as helping students who come from “bad situations,” thus enacting a missionary/native relationship between students and staff. In Saint-John’s words:

You have to come and love and understand that our school is an expression of social justice. So we really believe that the best anti-poverty program is to put together a world-class school, and if you don’t believe that, then this isn’t the place [for you]. Either people light up at that stuff or they don’t light up at it. (personal communication, September 2, 2010)

Reinforcing this explicit missionary ideology was the emphasis by Riverside’s staff on love and emotional engagement. Tied to this emphasis was an underlying assumption that students need love and emotional engagement from their teachers and their schools. This may imply that the school serves as a proxy for family. As I highlighted in a previous section, Ken Grayson spoke of Riverside students needing to experience “healthy relationships with adults,” reflecting his assumptions about student deficits. In hiring staff, he looked for an emotional orientation that he felt teachers should have: “[We as teachers need to] build the relationship well with students and let them know that they are loved. And we are going to ‘challenge you because we love you’” (personal communication, September 17, 2010).
This notion of love and emotional engagement was tied to the focus on growth. Recall that Saint-John spoke of this emotional engagement as necessary to working at Riverside:

Yeah, you have to love kids. You have to have that growth approach, that notion that kids are going to grow over time, that’s our whole function and you have to have that long term view that kids aren’t good right now but you are going to keep making gains, you are going to be consistent, and you are going to be who you are. (personal communication, September 2, 2010)

Saint-John articulated this notion of growth as intimately tied to love. This emotional engagement is reflective of a missionary orientation toward students with deficit assumptions of what they need. And Grayson further expounded on this notion of growth as essential to teacher practice:

We had some folks come in with certain ideas about college prep. We had conversations about what college prep means, and this is where you had some teachers say, “I did my plans and the kids didn’t follow through. They fail.” I’m like, “Maybe you’re failing; you need to help the kid learn.” That’s the whole role of growth. (personal communication, September 17, 2010)

Teachers who did not foreground growth in these particular ways were seen as ineffective educators. Emphasizing growth in teacher practice entailed giving students different access points to prevent a failing grade. As I highlighted in a previous section, students were perceived as not having the emotional resilience to handle a failing grade, so work expectations had to be negotiated, and the idea of growth provided an entry point to this negotiation. In Chapter 5, I deconstruct how this idea of growth was tied to practices of negotiation.
4.5 Practices of Remediation

At the institutional level, Riverside instituted several programs to support student learning. My analysis of discursive practices operating at Riverside reflects unique ideological orientations toward students. These orientations located these institutional initiatives as practices of remediation. The road to college-readiness was circumscribed by the belief that students need emotional support and that external factors affect one’s ability to learn. Consequently, remediating familial deficits, behavior, and cultural attitudes were the underlying goals in these broad practices that were instituted to help make Riverside students college-ready. The hyper-vigilance around remediating cultural practices, reframing student beliefs, and pathologizing student behavior assumes the inability of students to have any critical or substantive intellectual purchase on the world. It also assumes that students are not agents of change in their own learning, which stands in opposition to critical pedagogy orientations, like those of Freire (1993), that are invested in equity but also assume human agency:

Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in relation with the world. (p. 79)

In the introduction to this chapter, I deconstructed the explicitness of Riverside’s mission statement and how it was informed by racialized constructions of the school’s students. As part of the academic socialization practices at Riverside, the school designed a set of initiatives that supported college-readiness, namely Rising Stars, Minority
Mentorship Brotherhood, Daily Harmony, and Social and Behavioral Intervention. These initiatives sought to modify perceived cultural behaviors, attitudes, and belief systems. With their varying intentions and purposes, they reveal the staff’s conception of students at Riverside. In this section, I unpack how these programs belied students’ academic and cultural identities.

4.5.1 Rising Stars

Through the Rising Stars program, students had the opportunity to participate in enrichment activities outside of the school during the summer break. By design, the program sought to:

- connect students with enrichment opportunities that may have otherwise been unavailable to them;
- complement the academically rigorous school-year program;
- develop leadership and academic skills that could be applied both inside and outside of the classroom;
- enhance college-readiness;
- offer students experiences that would give them a competitive edge when they began the college admission and scholarship application processes; and
- prepare families for their children’s ultimate departure for college by providing multiple opportunities to practice the absence of their children from the family system.

Saint-John spoke of the explicit purpose of instituting the Rising Stars program at Riverside. First and foremost, he thought that this program provided students with
enrichment experiences as well the socializing mechanisms to explore their future identities as college students. At its foundation, the Rising Stars program had goals and outcomes that were similar to other enrichment programs, with one exception: to prepare families for a student’s eventual departure. This practice of socialization was rooted in a deficit ideology. Saint-John explored the necessity of this program not just in providing enrichment activities, but also in helping families to understand the implications of sending their children to college:

Rising Stars is a good example [of helping students acclimate themselves to college]. So our notion is during the summer, send kids away to colleges and universities to do academic enrichment, many times courses for credit. To get on a college campus, get out of the neighborhood and compete with the entire nation. Then you get thirsty for college, and your parents—your grand moms and moms—figure out [what] that family system is going to be like while you are away at college. So you can practice that with the family. It requires courage and brilliance, [and] you come back knowing why academic achievement is important.” (personal communication, September 2, 2010)

This auxiliary mission statement speaks to a distinct assumption that Riverside’s parents and, by extension, the students’ communities were obstacles to college-readiness.

It is important to note that what was emphasized was the assumption that families may not have expectations of sending their children away to college. This assumption may have been tied to an assumption that families whose children attended Riverside did not value education and, in some cases, they constrained students’ opportunities to leave home and go to college. Beyond academic inclination, being college-ready (as defined by Rising Stars) meant that students must redefine even their most intimate relationships and shift how
they operated within their families. This program was thus reflective of the broader deficit ideology. The role of the program as working to remediate students’ and families cultural understandings and experiences of college-readiness was also thus tied to the broader missionary ideology: The critical and contingent pathway to college success, as conceptualized by Riverside’s leadership, was determined by the ways in which the students’ academic and social identities were intentionally shaped and molded by the school, thus pointing to a missionary/native relationship between school/community.

In short, the assumption was that who you are and where you come from affects your ability to learn and may even constrain your future opportunities. In the case of the Rising Stars program, a proper education and college-readiness had to be imposed upon families by the school. Rising Stars served not only as a “social service arm” but also as an imposition, the primary change agent for families and communities.

4.5.2 Minority Mentorship Brotherhood

Beyond shaping identities, the school implemented a program to address socio-emotional growth. The Minority Mentorship Brotherhood project sought to address male achievement through workshops and a mentorship program. The program, its name, and its intended purpose inflected racialized meanings with respect to Black male academic engagement. The ideological foundations of the program constructed male students at Riverside as unmotivated, emotionally fragile, and intellectually disengaged. Furthermore, these constructions assumed that lack of engagement was a function of behavioral issues, altercations between students, and underlying violence between male students. Headed by male teachers, counselors, and ancillary staff, Minority Mentorship Brotherhood offered
programs and experiences designed to address the perceived needs of the male students at Riverside. These experiences included workshops concerning violence prevention, mentorship models that cultivated the importance of intellect, retreats, text message reminders about looming deadlines, and so forth.

Minority Mentorship Brotherhood was one part of a myriad of institutional initiatives that privileged emotional support over academic engagement. The practices embedded in this program, such as outings and retreats, worked toward building emotional relationships with students by focusing on remediating perceived traits and behaviors of the male students at Riverside. Anger management training and emotional support were the key priorities of these daylong institutes. The practices embedded in these institutes centered on conversations about emotional vulnerability, male identity, and responsibilities that male students at Riverside had as minorities. Other practices embedded in this initiative were to send boys text and email reminders of academic deadlines and work that was outstanding. These racialized practices constructed “minority” men as having aggressive tendencies and issues with anger; as lacking motivation; and as lacking understanding of schooling practices. This program suggested that Black male students were not academically independent and lacked the personal resilience as well as the cultural, intellectual, and emotional resources to function effectively in school because of its intent focus on school behaviors and motivations as opposed to critical and intellectual engagement. However, many scholars have examined the use of critical pedagogy and relevant cultural practices as a critical avenue for supporting engagement of Black male students (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Stovall, 2006a, 2006b; Tatum, 2009, 2011, 2012; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). These various
praxes drew upon the assumption that students are critical agents of change in their world and come to school with a rich body of intellectual and emotional resources. Additionally, Woofe (2010), in her study of the academic engagement of boys, noted that boys are not passive learners, but rather are critically aware of their school system, had clear long-term goals for their own education, and were self-reflective of their academic engagement in that they were able to identify the classroom and school conditions that most effectively addressed their learning needs.

It is important to note that while the Minority Mentorship Brotherhood initiative was a mechanism for supporting socio-emotional development, it did not address meaningful academic engagement, which is arguably a significant piece in the college-readiness “puzzle.”

4.5.3 Social and Behavioral Intervention

A system of external rewards and incentives was also reflected in the Social and Behavioral Intervention program [SBI], which was instituted throughout the building at Riverside. The goal of SBI was to invoke certain student behaviors through a system of positive reinforcement and systems of rewards. This model for creating school culture was informed by research in behavioral psychology that focuses on response, intervention, and remediation. Teachers were encouraged to give excellence referrals to students if they exhibited behaviors that aligned with college-readiness. Every month, the school administration performed an audit that identified the number of excellence referrals teachers gave out. In this way, teachers were strongly encouraged to give out excellence referrals. The practices were part of a behavioral modification system that supported
practices of respect, timeliness, coming to school in uniform, staying on task in the classroom, and working collaboratively with teachers and with other students. This system strove to encourage these behaviors through positive reinforcement. By implication, these behaviors were perceived to be lacking in Riverside's students, who were constructed as disrespectful, tardy, disengaged in class, and not collaborative. More importantly, these reward systems (in the form of excellence referrals and trophies) did not acknowledge the development of adolescents. Specifically, these reward systems did not engage with students' intellectual and critical sensibilities.

Jackie Reynolds, an English teacher at Riverside, spoke of this program as a way of both lowering expectations and infantilizing students:

This positive behavioral system, where you give kids excellence referrals for coming to class every day and on time, [is ineffective]. It's something you do with little, little kids. My daughter's school has [SBI]. It's a positive rewards system that supposedly encourages kids to do better because you give them rewards to do things they should be doing anyways. (personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Reynolds alluded to the program as a socializing mechanism that lowered expectations for students; in fact, the program mirrored the same practices of much younger students, such as her daughter, who was age six years old at the time of our interview. Thus, there were inappropriate developmental assumptions for Riverside students embedded in the program.
4.5.4 Daily Harmony

The purpose of the Daily Harmony program was to create a culture of calm in the school. Specifically, this culture of calm was sought to minimize fights and altercations between students. By incentivizing good behavior, Daily Harmony encouraged the creation and sustainment of a positive school culture. Saint-John spoke of the critical nature of the inception of the Daily Harmony initiative:

[You] can’t get to academics unless you establish a culture. And a kid can’t really keep their eye on the future if they’re always watching their back. And the first couple of years we weren’t together on that; there were fights, and fights make a school dumb. So we really had to do that well. (personal communication, September 2, 2010)

The implementation of this initiative constructed students as aggressive and in need of broad behavioral management. This behavioral management aspect of school culture was emphasized as building students’ emotional support and helping them to engage in academics. Students were given pizza parties, dress-down days, and pep rallies as recognition for consecutive days without a fight in the building. These incentives were tiered such that longer stretches of “days of peace” yielded more and better external rewards. What was echoed again is that students’ success in academics is heavily contingent on socio-emotional growth. This unilateral focus was infused with a disposition toward remediating practices and behaviors that students bring to the school. The Daily Harmony program drew upon an understanding of communities as spaces of chaos. By implication, students had to learn how to function in varying institutional contexts. Saint-John identified the community as a negative influence, which may have impacted the ways in which students interacted with each other and with staff in the building: “In this
community, there’s all sorts of influences that can put us at each other’s throat, and that’s ok, but you work it out without laying your hand on someone” (personal communication, September 2, 2010). Saint-John perceived the Daily Harmony program as overturning the behavioral norms of students—norms which were informed by their own culture and community and which were at odds with the ways students should function in school. The program, in incentivizing students with pizza parties, did not acknowledge students’ developmental level and, most importantly, it de-emphasized student independence and personal accountability.

Daily Harmony was met with some criticism by teachers at Riverside. Reynolds viewed the Daily Harmony program, like SBI, as a vehicle for infantilizing students and promoting low expectations:

When I was in high school, there was no such thing as [a Daily Harmony program]—it was “you don’t fight in school” that was a school rule. You don’t get rewarded for not acting crazy; that was the expectation. The expectation [at Riverside] is that our students are going to fight, so let’s give [them] an incentive not to fight. (personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Like SBI, the Daily Harmony program assumed a limited view and limited expectations for Black students. Cultivating ownership and responsibility, which is preceded by the foundational assumption that students bring a conscious intentionality to school spaces, was absent from these institutional initiatives and dominant discourses at Riverside.
4.6 Reframing the Discourse From Supporting Resilience to Supporting Human Agency: Critical Pedagogy

This suite of initiatives at Riverside was designed to address and respond to students’ expected behaviors, attitudes, and belief systems. In many cases, external reward systems were in place to promote intended outcomes and behaviors that reflected a behaviorist approach to learning and human behavior. Consequently, these initiatives worked to discredit students and infuse a stimuli-response approach to student behavior, in turn reflecting how these efforts tend to situate Black students in the context of their community, their relationships, and the processes of learning. This orientation stands in sharp contrast to how we, as a society, situate more advantaged students, who are socialized to reiterate the practices in their communities and act as agents of change in the broader society. Scholars in the field of critical pedagogy have interrogated how to best serve students through practices that are participant-driven, that are socially responsive to the needs of students, and that take into consideration human agency as a form of social empowerment (Auerbach, 1989; Freire, 1993; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Quigley, 1997; Shor, 1992). Critical theorists have examined how the “one size fits all” approach masks the individual needs of students (Bartolomé, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Shor, 1992; Shor & Freire, 1987). At Riverside College Prep, that “one size fits all” approach was enacted through academic socialization practices that assumed deficits and emphasized socio-emotional support. In ignoring agency, students were perceived as passive participants in their own learning and, through teachers’ instruction, as receptors of knowledge with little sense of their own subjectivity and intention to transform their own lives (Friere, 1993; Shor, 1992). Friere (1993, 1998), a seminal critical
pedagogy scholar, referred to the importance of dialogic communication between teachers and students as an integral step in creating educational parity. At what point are students expected or encouraged to reflect on their actions and the ensuing implications as agents in their environment? At Riverside, not paying focused attention to student agency, intentionality, and choice was reflected in larger institutional discourses on positive socio-emotional socialization, and that critical gap in discourse instantiated across other practices in the school, specifically curriculum development and design, assessment policies, and student-staff relationships.
CHAPTER 5
NEGOTIATING SUCCESS AND FAILURE

“Help me understand what “college prep” means. Not what it means for these kids, but when Dartmouth looks at transcripts and it says ‘Riverside College Prep,’ versus any other college prep school in the city, help me understand why it is that we have a special definition for what it means for college prep because of these kids, this population of kids. We are operating on a deficit model that says they need extra support. I don’t think they need extra support. I think we need to say, ‘Here are the expectations. Now meet them, and we are going to help you get there, but we are not going to keep lowering the expectations because you are not meeting them.’”

-Jackie Reynolds, English Teacher at Riverside College Prep

This chapter’s opening quotation comes from an interview with Jackie Reynolds. She had been with the English department for five years at the time that I interviewed her in 2009. Her commitment to teaching at Riverside College Prep was grounded in facilitating students’ opportunities to learn in an academically rigorous environment that would prepare them for college. When I asked her about the academic expectations for students at Riverside College Prep, Reynolds reflected on a troubling dynamic that provided further insight into the meaning of college-readiness: an ongoing practice of negotiation that resulted in the periodic lowering of academic expectations and that reflected deficit-oriented constructions of students’ academic and racial identities.

In beginning to unpack the meaning of college-readiness at Riverside College Prep, I showed in Chapter 4 how the theme of remediation was instantiated in the mission, ideologies, and discourses that informed institutional practices at the school, including teacher selection and the implementation of student support initiatives. In this chapter, I continue to unpack the meaning of college-readiness through an analysis of teacher discourses and practices, particularly in relation to the English Language Arts curriculum.
The English department can be viewed as an ideological and discursive space that instantiates the institutional meanings for college-readiness as well as a space that both reflects and challenges the institutional construction of students’ academic-, racial-, gender-, and class-based identities. When referring to the *institutional construction of identity*, I mean the characteristics of students, their backgrounds, and their competencies that were constructed and foregrounded in the dominant discourses, ideologies, and institutionally sanctioned practices that operated at Riverside College Prep (see Figure 5.1, below). These characteristics are described later in this chapter.

Figure 5.1. Institutional construction of identity.
5.1 The Dominant Discourses at Riverside

I identify “dominant” discourses and ideologies as those that were held by individuals who had the most power at the school. For example, the words of Ken Grayson and Edward Saint-John, the co-founders of Riverside College Prep, carried more weight in the school, and they had the power to drive the larger initiatives at the building level. So their ideological orientations were more instrumental in shaping academic socialization practices that those of the teachers and other administrators. Furthermore, Grayson and Saint-John had hiring and firing power, thus allowing them to make personnel decisions based on how they felt a teacher’s disposition aligned to their thinking: “If a teacher doesn’t believe that all students can learn, they don’t belong here” (E. Saint-John, personal communication, September 2, 2010). Similarly, Ted O’Brien, as the English department chair, held more sway over curriculum initiatives and instructional practices than other teachers in the English department. He referred to the importance of a “common vision” as a key factor in improving instructional practice—and that common vision was implementation of the growth model. As O’Brien was part of the curriculum leadership team at Riverside, his beliefs about practice, as well as his beliefs about students, were weighed more heavily, and they informed department policy. Although at times I will show how teacher beliefs and comments served as proxies for “the institution,” I am not suggesting that all teachers and staff held opinions that uniformly and unequivocally supported the dominant ideologies and discourses. In fact, at certain times, or relative to particular practices, teachers expressed beliefs that ran counter to “the institution.” Table V (next page) identifies where I believe teachers and staff stood relative to the dominant ideologies, discourses, and attitudes toward students and practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Alignment to institutional ideology or practices</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted O’Brien&lt;br&gt;English Department Chair</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>“A lot of times, kids come in having pretty much convinced themselves they are not college-bound and they are not smart.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Bradshaw&lt;br&gt;English Department Co-chair</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>“A lot of them come from backgrounds that are not as advantaged as the majority of the country. They have some real challenges.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Park&lt;br&gt;Sophomore and Junior English Teacher</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>“Each seat is filled with a story and soul and something that is broken.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad Dunlay&lt;br&gt;Writing Center Teacher&lt;br&gt;Online Credit Recovery Teacher</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>“I think my kids need love.”&lt;br&gt;“So there is all this negotiation between students and adults...that’s a huge waste of time when kids can’t read very well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Reynolds&lt;br&gt;Sophomore and Junior English Teacher</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>“I think the things that we do for kids [don’t] help them in college, it handicaps them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Thompkins&lt;br&gt;AP and Sophomore English Teacher</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>“The reality is that we spoil them...I mean they are babyed.”&lt;br&gt;“[The growth model] is a struggle for me internally.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table V. Teachers’ Alignment to Institutional Ideologies and Practices
As I show in the table above, not all teachers at Riverside held beliefs that aligned with missionary or deficit orientations at all times. In some instances, they problematized the practices of the department or school. For example, as discussed in Chapter 4, while Brad Dunlay's interview may have indicated that he subscribed to a missionary ideology, he also had some reservations about the Daily Harmony initiative and the behavior policies at the school (which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter). English teacher Jason Thompkins struggled with the efficacy of the growth model, seeing both advantages and disadvantages to this approach to grading (also to be discussed later in this chapter).

Teachers were identified as having a “high” alignment to institutional ideology or practices if their attitudes towards the missionary and deficit ideologies were strong as well as if their attitudes towards academic socialization practices were positive. A high alignment, therefore is reflected through teacher discourse that reflects institutional ideologies as well as a strong buy-in for the policies, practices, and curriculum initiatives at Riverside.

Teachers were identified as having a “medium” alignment to institutional ideology and practice if interviews or practices reflected some ambivalence or lack of buy in with respect to the ideologies, policies, practices, and curriculum initiatives. A “low” alignment was reflected in a strong lack of buy in to the ideologies, policies, practices, or curriculum initiatives at Riverside.

While the individual beliefs and attitudes of teachers may have varied, I am equally interested in how the amalgam of ideologies, discourses, and practices operated to uphold the dominant construction of student identity as well as how individual teacher narratives resisted these constructions. The dominant identity characteristics uncovered in my analysis were: (1) students lacked resilience; (2) students lacked responsibility; and (3)
students lacked knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors. Table VI (next two pages) reflects how these identity characteristics were instantiated in ideology, discourse, or practices throughout the duration of my study.
### Institutional Construction of Academic Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Reflected in: Discourse (D), Ideology (I), or Practice (P) (Academic Socialization)</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>College-Readiness Identities Not Addressed in Discourse, Ideology, or Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Lacked Resilience** | - Growth Model (P)  
- Socio-emotional support from staff (P)  
- Minority Mentorship Brotherhood (P)  
- Deficit Orientation (I)  
- Missionary Orientation (I)  
- Emotional support: love (D) | “I think it is universal, and I think it's magnified at Riverside, that kids need to have relationships with adults who care about them...because so many kids come through the door not having healthy relationships with adults.”  
Ken Grayson, Chief Operating Officer  

“The kids now know, 'I go to an unsuccessful school. I'm going to an under-performing school. We must not be very bright.'”  
Cynthia Banks, Principal  

“You know our kids are as bright as the kids at high-performing schools, but their confidence in their intellect is very shallow.”  
Ted O’Brien, Department Chair | - Academic independence  
- Individual responsibility/agency  
- Intellectual rigor through acceleration: increasing level of rigor in tasks  
- Opportunities for acceleration through consistent and repeated practice  
- Perseverance |
| **Lacked Responsibility** | - Socio-emotional support from staff (P)  
- Teachers as proxy for family (D)  
- SBI (P)  
- Growth Model (P)  
- Minority Men (P) | “There are no fathers, so the accountability piece is missing.”  
Jane Park, English Teacher  

“I think for better or worse, Riverside’s approach is sort of like a family approach. So the solution is sort | - Academic independence  
- Disciplined approach to academic tasks and practices  
- Accountability for academic behaviors |
### Deconstructing College-Readiness

| Lacked Knowledge of School Practices and College-Ready Behaviors | • Rising Stars (P) | • Intellectual enrichment |
| • SBI (P) | • Developmentally appropriate incentives |
| • Daily Harmony (P) | • Parental involvement |
| • Deficit Orientation (I) | |
| • Missionary Orientation (I) | |
| • Cultural deficits of students (D) | |

| Emotional support: love (D) | of like love.” Brad Dunlay, Writing Resource Teacher |
| Missionary Orientation (I) | |
| Deficit Orientation (I) | |

| Opportunities for acceleration through consistent and repeated practice |

| "They're hot messes. That to me is the ideal student because then [you've] got this wonderful campus, and by senior year you look forward to knowing them as young adults [because] they become these terrific humans. We like the hot messes.” Edward Saint-John, President |

| "Then you get thirsty for college and your parents—your grand moms and moms—figure out [what] that family system is going to be like while you are away at college. So you can practice that with the family. It requires courage and brilliance, [and] you come back knowing why academic achievement is important.” Edward Saint-John |

| Table VI. Institutional Construction of Identity as Addressed through Ideologies, Discourses, or Practices at Riverside |
At Riverside, some staff and teachers’ assumptions about resilience led to instruction- and discipline-based practices in which students were consistently given opportunities to (1) view academic success as tied to effort and (2) see success in their learning through highly scaffolded tasks and growth measures. Most importantly, this orientation toward teaching and learning presupposed that Riverside students could not experience failure under any circumstances because it would have further damaged, in the eyes of the school’s founders, the students’ already fragile socio-emotional development; this was an orientation consistent with a deficit ideology. This notion may have impeded opportunities for students to have other academic identities made available to them. It is important to note that resilience, as defined by these terms, is specific to this context (i.e., by the staff and teachers at Riverside College Prep). The extant literature on resilience addresses a far more varied and complex conceptualization of resilience, which examine how various factors support resilience, takes into consideration how students respond to and deal effectively with adversity, and what the common attributes of resilience are, which are identified in more detail in Chapter 2. Institutional assumptions about poverty and familial structures led to paternalistic attitudes toward students in that teachers had to take on “familial” roles to “compensate” for what students may not have experienced at home. These assumptions led to lowered expectations and an orientation toward pathologizing and rationalizing what should have counted as unacceptable student behavior rather than holding students directly accountable. Assumptions about students’ knowledge of the behavioral standards led to a prioritization of certain performative stances of behavior as representing the desired ways of being for a “good” student. These performative stances included punctuality, consistent adherence to the uniform policy, not engaging in fights or
being written up for disciplinary issues, and consistent attendance—behaviors that were rewarded through the initiatives of Daily Harmony and SBI. These behaviors were often privileged over academic performance. In Chapter 7, I unpack how these behavioral and performative standards associated at Riverside with college-readiness were privileged over classroom-based academic behaviors. Furthermore, some college-ready behaviors and habits of mind that these socialization processes failed to address included independence, student accountability, individual responsibility/agency, a disciplined approach to completing assignments, and accelerated learning for students who did not need academic intervention. As a caveat, I acknowledge that “rigor” is a problematic and ideologically loaded term. The quest for “rigor” has propelled curriculum that focuses narrowly on raising test scores. In this dissertation, I utilize the term rigor to point to the ways in which students were not challenged given the broad assumptions about resilience and academic achievement at Riverside.

5.2 Constructing Student Identities: Teacher Discourse in the English Department

In the previous section, I outlined how the dominant discourses and ideologies informed practices and constructed students at Riverside. In this section, I provide an overview of how missionary and deficit ideologies were reflected in the teacher discourse within the English department at Riverside and how these discourses aligned to institutional constructions of student identity. This is not to say that there was no resistance by individual teachers within the department to broad notions of student identity or departmental practices, but rather that the teacher discourses that aligned to
missionary and deficit ideologies were more frequent and emerged as dominant themes in teacher interviews and staff meetings.

In my analysis of the four English department staff meetings and two all-staff meetings that I attended at Riverside, two prominent themes emerged relative to instructional practice: (1) the importance of a common vision and all teachers being on the “same page,” and (2) the consistent tension around providing support for students versus cultivating independence. The first theme is important to consider in a later discussion of individual teachers’ resistance to practices in the department (Jackie Reynolds’s story). The second theme was continually revisited both in teachers’ discussions on student practice at department meetings and also in all-staff discussions of cross-department policies related to instructional practice. This theme is important to consider in that discussions of “support” were continually framed around students’ affective dispositions and motivations and less informed by student academic data. Below are some of my observations and analysis taken directly from field notes during staff meetings:

Steve Bradshaw and a colleague from the math department present some student work around the Senior Project. Steve mentions that he has found students struggling with the project, which is normal for the beginning of the year. He also raises some questions. “What is stopping them from doing this? This [Senior Project] is a big thing and it means a lot to their confidence.” Steve discusses various ways that teachers can support students in getting their Senior Project completed by the end of the year. Meeting with them after school. Coaching them through the process. It is interesting that he focuses on their confidence and not on the skills required to complete the project. (all-staff meeting field notes, October 29, 2010)
“[With] So many things in our school [that allow for flexibility] is that it is fine line [between support and accountability], by giving them the help they need, but not hand holding; in college they will need to advocate for themselves”—teacher from another department is responding to the discussion around helping struggling students.

(English department meeting field notes, May 31, 2011)

The recurring discussion of balancing support and cultivating independence is significant because the emphasis on emotional support and building confidence was actualized in the tensions that teachers faced at Riverside. As an aside, while the Senior Project identified a level of rigor and sturdy alignment to college skills and habits of mind (via the AP standards), these expectations were continually modified and redefined because of the prevailing belief by administrators and the department chair that students should not and could not experience failure—and thus the tension arose around supporting students and responding to their needs without depriving them of the opportunity to struggle, but to gain independent, problem-solving dispositions.

I found through teacher interviews that some teachers in the English department expressed beliefs that aligned to the characteristics of student identity as identified in Table VI (pp. 124-5). As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Ted O’Brien held strongly to a belief that many Riverside students lacked resilience and he stressed the importance of providing opportunities for students to experience success with academics:

Our students need to feel like they have game and can play at the highest level. If we were dealing with students from a better-resourced community, then our expectations would be different. It is important to think about who you are teaching; students at [a
better resourced school] don’t need the same type of flexibility. (personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Jane Park, the sophomore and junior English teacher, echoed O’Brien’s sentiments regarding student resilience and the high level of emotional support that her students needed. In her interview, she discussed her previous experience teaching at a suburban school and how she conceptualized the difference:

Ansari: Do you think your suburban students needed less emotional support than your students at Riverside?

Park: Definitely. When I think about those one or two [suburban] students that were the issue kids, they were the students whose parents had a messy divorce or they were students who were living in Section 8 housing. But those are the kids, a lot of them are here, and I feel like the emotional energy among one or two of them needs to be divided amongst all of these kids. Sometimes you don’t get to them all. Each seat is filled with a story and a soul and something that is broken. (personal communication, November 3, 2010)

As demonstrated through this characterization of the Riverside students’ lack of resilience, O’Brien perceived that “flexibility” in expectations were important to cultivating strong academic identities, which may have some implications for teacher practice and curriculum design. Park saw her role at Riverside as tied to providing emotional support to her students and, in the same vein, conflated external circumstances (poverty, cultural deficits) with the ability to learn. Furthermore, the broad assumption by Park that her students were “broken,” and thus by definition needed fixing, implicated both teacher and student in a missionary/native relationship. Erasing individuality with generalities about what her
students needed or did not need relative to their suburban counterparts served to (1) essentialize Black students; (2) ignore student agency; (3) ignore individual variation relative to motivation; and (4) disavow the varied intellectual and emotional resources that students bring to the classroom.

Steve Bradshaw, the co-chair of the English department, who worked closely with his colleague and co-chair on developing and implementing the curriculum vision in the department, discussed, like Park, how his students may have been different from other students and what that difference meant for his work:

The mission is encapsulated really well in the mission statement—to take students from under-served communities and prepare them with the resilience and academic skills necessary to successfully complete college. And I really feel like it is twofold. Our students need both. They’re teenagers, and what teenager starts high school ready to be successful in college? But a lot of them lack the social and emotional skills to be successful in school as well as the academic skills. So we want to— I feel like we honor what they do bring. Our kids are really smart, and they do bring a lot of skills, but they are not necessarily college-ready skills. So our mission is just to prepare students who maybe don’t come to us as academic superstars to succeed in college. And that really takes work on both the social/emotional level and the academic level. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

I highlight these voices in particular because Bradshaw and O’Brien, as curriculum leaders, had more power to uphold and carry the dominant ideologies operating in the school. Though not a department leader, Park, who took a missionary stance as a teacher (and also as a former missionary), is another important voice to consider because her
views (see Table V, p. 121) aligned very closely with Riverside’s institutional ideologies and practices.

In addition to lacking resilience, students at Riverside were broadly characterized as lacking responsibility. This lack of responsibility was tied to ideas of cultural deficits, namely that students did not value possessing a strong academic identity or being perceived as intelligent, especially male students at Riverside. The issue of incomplete work and lack of academic engagement was attributed to a lack of strong academic identity and absent fathers. In her reflection on why some students, specifically the males, were not as engaged with academics, Park discussed the orientation that many of her male students had toward academics and schooling: “For boys, it is just more acceptable and more okay for them not to do their work. They may have the knowledge, but they won’t back it up by turning in stuff” (personal communication, November 3, 2010).

Male students at Riverside were perceived as not valuing or engaging in their academic identities in the same ways that many of the female students did. This understanding of how and why males consistently underperformed with respect to their female counterparts was tied to how academic identity can be further constructed relative to gender. Equally troubling was the lack of acknowledgement of individual variation amongst males, the particularities of their personality, and how they made meaning of their academic lives. As such, student agency and choice were left out of the discussion. Additionally, there was no acknowledgement of the academic and intellectual contributions that boys brought to the classroom. Thus male students were racially and academically constructed as disengaged from their learning. This was also tied to the assumption that male students at Riverside did not have male role models whose attitudes and behaviors (such as responsibility and
self-reliance) they could have emulated and whose accountability measures they would face at home, as from a father. Park reflected on Black male achievement and shared her belief that the absence of fathers was a determining factor in why some of her male students were academically disengaged:

There are no fathers, so that accountability piece is missing. One student failing was put in honors but was failing his first semester. He showed a lot of improvement his second semester, and in his reflection he said that his stepfather made him take more responsibility for his schoolwork. (personal communication, November 3, 2010)

Park perceived family structures and academic engagement as mutually constitutive. In identifying the absence of a father as a factor in the male students’ lack of academic engagement, she invoked a missionary stance on teaching students, citing that her function in the classroom was not only to serve as a teacher, but also to serve as a proxy for family. In fact, in her interview she discussed how Ted O’Brien encouraged her to think about “male” and “female” constructions and behaviors when she interacted with her students, especially the males:

Ted told me, “You are a female teacher; you need to find in yourself whatever male presence that you can bring to your students.” Ted has had to find that nurturing, feminine side to himself for those students who need that and don’t have it at home. And he told me, “You need to find that more masculine, fatherly, you know, hard-working, discipline, accountability side for your students who need that and aren’t getting it at home.” (personal communication, November 3, 2010)

These practices at once constructed students in ways that assumed deficits in academics that were caused by the lack of a traditional family structure, specifically the lack of
parental figures, while at the same time failed to define or implement practices that supported accountability and independence. Very little of the discourse surrounding academic engagement pointed to addressing academic behaviors in the classroom. In fact, the discourse reflected a movement toward pathologizing these behaviors and addressing them through practices that circumvented the necessity for students to exercise accountability and independence in their learning and in their academic life.

Additionally, a driving assumption about Riverside students was that they lacked knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors. This was addressed through several school-wide initiatives (Rising Stars, Daily Harmony, Minority Mentorship Brotherhood). Bradshaw reflected on his students’ knowledge about college or the realities of college that they might face:

I think my students need to realize how hard they need to work to succeed. We don’t have a whole lot of students who score off the charts on their ACT here. In some ways, our best students are big fish in a small pond, and I think that we have a lot of students who get A’s here and take the honors and AP courses and believe that they are going to breeze through college. And so I think that they need to understand how rigorous college really is and that even if they are among the best students at Riverside, that doesn’t mean that they ready. So I think that’s one thing that they need, and I think programs like [Rising Stars help], where they go out and meet students from other schools, other socioeconomic backgrounds, and students who are academically more ahead of them, and being able to take classes with them and interact with them, and also just going to a college or a prep school, being exposed to academic curriculum
outside of Riverside. I think that really helps to raise awareness and help them build confidence. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

Bradshaw’s interview raises a question concerning academic socialization: How do the academic socialization practices at Riverside afford or constrain opportunities for academic skill development?

Bradshaw perceived his students as not having a full understanding of the types of skills that are needed in college. More problematic, however, was the fact that the grades they received at Riverside did not necessarily reflect how students might be assessed outside of the context of Riverside. In Chapter 4, I referenced the mechanism of “protection” that operated at the school, in which students were not given opportunities to engage in rigorous skill development. This was highlighted in Bradshaw’s interview, in which he alluded to the fact that students may have had a false sense of how they really compared to other students more broadly, e.g., a grade of an “A” at Riverside did not necessarily guarantee that a student would be equally successful when they got to college.

5.3 “And Now We Are Setting Them Up to Fail”: Negotiating College-Readiness

My analysis in the previous sections provided (1) a description of how student academic identity was constructed at Riverside through complex processes of socialization (informed by ideology, discourse, and practices) and (2) how understandings of student identity were reflected (and reified) through Riverside teachers’ discourse. In this section, I analyze how these understandings of student identity underscored departmental practices at Riverside. The curriculum expectations set forth by the department pointed to a rigorous set of standards that were aligned to the academic practices and skills that students would
encounter when they attended college (via the AP standards-aligned curriculum). However, racialized assumptions about students at Riverside posed immediate implications for how the curriculum was implemented and actualized. These assumptions created opportunities for negotiating academic standards through both grades and behavioral practices. Taken together, these negotiation practices impacted teacher expectations and may have prevented students from engaging in academic identities that enacted independence, individual responsibility, and agency. Furthermore, they prevented students from engaging in practices that promoted independent problem solving, held students accountable to clear deadlines and rigorous expectations, accelerated their learning, built consistent work habits, and engaged students in a disciplined approach to completing assignments. It is important to note these particular identities and the ensuing academic practices did not emerge as a theme or a priority in teacher interviews or staff meetings; in fact, they were absent from discourse discussions. As such, socialization at the departmental level may have created obstacles for preparing students for college.

5.3.1 Negotiating Grading Policies

A key priority that surfaced at the institutional level at Riverside was providing socio-emotional support for students. This was exemplified through the emphasis by principals and senior leadership on growth in learning. This emphasis on growth was instantiated through a “growth model” for learning which impacted student evaluation and student grades. Through the growth model students were not assessed on their mastery of a defined set of skills, competencies, or concepts, but rather received a grade based on the amount of growth that they showed throughout the course of a quarter. The model also
took into consideration not just growth in academic competencies but also growth in academic behaviors. For example, if students showed growth in the area of turning in homework or spending time on-task in the classroom, then it was reflected in their grade. The growth model created a space for negotiating student grades and privileging student academic behavior over academic outcomes. Furthermore, this model as a grading mechanism allowed for modifying college-ready expectations within the department. The focus on emphasizing growth was buttressed by the assumption that students needed to feel motivated in their learning, leading to practices that would allow students to see a clear and immediate connection between effort and academic achievement. These assumptions may have created a mechanism of protection when it came to academic practices in the classroom by not providing students enough opportunities to struggle in their learning.

For example, the department created a rubric that outlined expected outcomes for an essay writing assignment. However, students were actually assessed by the way that they showed continued growth in particular areas of the rubric and not by the degree to which they met the criteria of the writing assignment. Students were given feedback on their writing such that they were aware of opportunities for growth and areas of improvement. A student would be unable to fail if they showed some growth across the course of the draft-writing and revision process. This model was intended to make students more metacognitive about their learning and to give them more ownership over their work. This growth model also included one-on-one conferences with teachers in which students would discuss areas of growth in their work and areas that needed improvement.
One of the limitations of the growth model was that because students were not penalized for missing homework assignments, if they showed growth in that area at all, they had an opportunity to take advantage of the system. For example, if a student would continually not turn in homework in the first half of the semester, but then completed the majority of the homework assignments in the second half, they were identified as showing growth in that area. This model was intended to be a very individualized evaluation program that would measure students against their own growth and capacity rather than against each other or against an external standard or outcome. Teachers in the department had varying opinions on the effectiveness of this model. O’Brien, Bradshaw, and Park viewed growth, as expressed in these examples, as necessary for continued learning. Others, including Reynolds and Dunlay, saw this model as impeding students’ future success as college students because students were not held accountable for incomplete work. Others still, such as Thompkins, felt a deep ambivalence in the utility of this model. These attitudes toward growth were also tied to how teachers perceived the resilience and capabilities of their students. O’Brien, Bradshaw, and Park perceived their students to be academically and emotionally fragile and in continual need of social, emotional, and academic support due to their life conditions. Reynolds was also concerned about her students’ future experiences as college students, but she put less of an emphasis on student life conditions as a primary consideration and placed more emphasis on academic preparation for college. Dunlay felt that the remediation practices at the institutional level, such as the Daily Harmony initiative, opened the door to negotiation of academic practices. In short, because behavioral expectations were continually modified, negotiation of
academic practices and standards followed suit. Thompkins’ saw both opportunities and challenges of the growth model.

This overemphasis of the virtue of growth was undergirded by the assumption that students would be unable to meet college-readiness expectations. In order to keep students motivated to learn, teachers would need to instill practices that did not measure mastery of skills. Linked to that belief was the over-prioritization of emotional responsiveness by faculty and staff as reflected in teacher discourse and behaviors such as punctuality, attendance, and dressing in uniform. These explicit messages that good relationships and superficial performative stances were integral to being a good student, and being college-ready, was a powerful socializing mechanism at Riverside.

O'Brien saw the growth model as a necessary tool for allowing students to motivate themselves and providing them with the confidence that they can succeed in the academic domain, and so he fully supported its implementation and emphasis. Several years prior, he had brought this idea to the school administration and asked his department to do some professional reading on the topic. He suggested to the administration that the lack of motivation and responsibility could be addressed with the implementation of this model. At the departmental level, the growth model was an instantiation of what it meant to teach students at Riverside. However, starting with the assumption that all students were unmotivated learners, the growth model became less individualized and responsive. O'Brien and others may have underestimated the reality that students came to the classroom with rich intellectual and emotional resources and academic capacities.
5.3.2 “They Found a Loophole in the System”: Limitations of the Growth Model

This outcome of socializing students to be confident, motivated learners through the implementation of the growth model was seen by Reynolds as lowering expectations for students, and furthermore, drawing from a deficit orientation toward students. Reynolds offered a counter-narrative to the prevailing ideological belief systems that focused on deficits. She found that these deficit orientations limited opportunities for students to advance academically and also led to diminished opportunities for students to enact college-ready practices and behaviors. In the opening quotation to this chapter, Reynolds alludes to how students were racially constructed at Riverside. Reynolds perceived practices in the English department as having harmful effects on her students and ultimately under-preparing them for college. She pointed to some limitations of the growth model and the inherent assumptions that her colleagues may have had of Black students.

When asked whether she thought that Riverside did a good job of preparing students for college, she said that she felt that many of the practices at the school would be an obstacle for her students:

Ansari: What would you say about Riverside and their support for college-bound academic practices?

Reynolds: I think we have a lot of growing up to do in that area. I think that the things that we do for kids [don’t] help them in college. It handicaps them.

Ansari: Like what?

Reynolds: Like the growth model grading. It is one of the main things that disturbs me, because in college it doesn’t exist. The growth model says that kids all come at a different level, and if they grow from where they are, no matter how big or small, then
we should pass them. In essence, they should get credit for doing anything. So if they come in and they are not doing homework, and then in four weeks they start turning in homework, then we are supposed to give them credit for that. And that means that they are passing. You can't fail them if they have demonstrated growth.

Ansari: What are some deficiencies to that?

Reynolds: I think when they get to college it is going to be a big shock. Whether you turn in 50 papers, or if you turn in zero papers, they don’t care at the end how many papers you turned in. If it doesn’t average out to what the professor is telling you it is supposed to average out to, you are going to fail [emphasis hers]. And I think that the kids are smart enough to know that if they turn in nothing and then they turn around and they turn in something, that is growth. So...they know that they are going to pass, so the kids aren’t stupid, they are buying into this whole thing. When they do self-evaluation, they are like, “Well, I wasn’t turning in anything before, and now I am turning in something, so now I should pass.” They found a loophole in the system. A lot of teachers don’t buy into that and believe that it is not fair on the kids, but what can you do at some point?

This is where we work. And now we are setting them up to fail when they get to college.

(personal communication, October 29, 2010).

Unlike some of her colleagues, Reynolds saw intellectual development and academic outcomes as contingent upon individual disposition rather than as a result of poverty, lack of family structure, and so forth. In fact, she perceived her students not just as responding to practices but also as co-constructors of the academic practices at Riverside. First, students did not merely participate in the academic socialization practices at Riverside, but they negotiated, contested, and responded in ways that they found immediately
advantageous. Thus she characterized her students as adaptable, critical, and with a strong sense of agency. Second, Reynolds did not assume her students to be inherently unresilient. In fact, she thought it was important to maintain expectations (as opposed to being “flexible”), a position fueled by her belief that her students had the ability to meet expectations. Consequently, her role as she perceived it was to socialize her students for practices that they would encounter in college.

5.3.3 “What Is Compassion to a Black Student?": Teacher Practice as Racialized Practice

As I referenced in Chapter 4, senior leadership at Riverside perceived individuals who voiced opposition toward practices and policies at Riverside as not being committed to student learning:

We had some folks come in with certain ideas about college prep. We had conversations about what college prep means, and this is where you had some teachers say, “I did my plans and the kids didn’t follow through. They fail.” I’m like, maybe you’re failing; you need to help kids learn. That’s the whole role of growth. (K. Grayson, personal communication, September 17, 2010)

Additionally, Saint-John perceived teacher resistance to curriculum policies at Riverside as a position as an individual who didn’t believe in “kindness.”

So we had some folks here that think we are not college prep and we are lowering our expectations, and being too kind to kids in these funny sorts of ways. (personal communication, September 2, 2010)
Reynolds’s resistance to the practices of the English department were met with friction at the institutional level (Grayson and Saint-John, the co-founders of the school). In fact, her resistance was dismissed and silenced by administrators instead of being characterized as a professional difference of opinion or something to be considered in discussions of instructional practice. On the contrary, Grayson characterized her as not being committed to student learning and, at the departmental level, as someone who did not adhere to the common vision laid out by the department by Ted O’Brien. As the year drew to a close, Reynolds’s contract was not renewed for the following year.

As I mentioned in an earlier section about teacher discourse, a common theme in staff meetings was the need for a “common vision” among staff of instructional practice. During the first quarter staff meetings, much of the conversation about how to build curriculum and how to address students’ needs was focused on responsiveness, support, and coming to a consensus on instructional practice. In a department meeting, O’Brien discussed how the effectiveness of his team was dependent on having a common vision of what it means to teach Riverside students: “It is important that we are all on the same page here in the English department. That is how we can best help each other and our students” (personal communication, November 11, 2010). While the importance of establishing a common vision and building consensus was emphasized, it was also a way of silencing resistance from individual teachers. In fact, Reynolds’s critique of the growth model and SBI was couched negatively as “not being on the same page” by O’Brien. Reynolds’s understanding of what it meant to teach her students in contrast to the institutional ideologies was divided along racial lines. Thompkins, a fellow English teacher, reflected on the tension
between Reynolds and O’Brien as a teacher’s understandings of student academic identity relative to the racial subject position of teachers:

So here’s where it is: I think it’s a cultural thing, and it has always been an issue, it has always been an issue at inner city schools amongst mostly traditional [schools]...and it has always been an issue between white staff and Black staff in the issue of compassion. What is compassion to a Black student? Is compassion letting them get away with things and feeling sympathy or whatever to allow that student to feel bad and try to reach them? Or to have pity or some sort of way to work it out? Some sort of emotional therapy? Or is compassion just never letting up from your expectations, and being very consistent, and never giving them an inch and just saying, “No, you didn’t do it, that is an F.” Well, I think the answer is somewhere in the middle, and I don’t think that all Black people feel one way and that all white people feel the other way, but I do think they are along racial and cultural lines in that, and that’s sort of the argument. (personal communication, May 31, 2011)

It is essential to note that while “common vision” was considered a very important component of professional practice (as identified by O’Brien), Reynolds’s opinions of practice were not taken up for discussion in staff meetings. This silencing of a Black teacher voice suggested white subjectivity as the privileged space in developing and implementing curriculum. Thompkins spoke of this normalization of white experience in his deconstruction of the cultural/racial divisions in the implementation of the growth model:

Well, I think white people would do it [provide flexibility] with white people. Because I think what white people don’t have to deal with or understand is that the world doesn’t treat you the way that [it treats Black people]...so that there is some race mixed in with
all of this sympathy, pity, and white guilt, whatever. (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Whiteness and white experience were privileged in Riverside’s implementation of the growth model. Students’ academic understandings were tied to deficit notions of academic ability and resilience. Furthermore, addressing college-readiness practices was understood as a white experience.

**5.3.4 Negotiating Disciplinary Practices**

In the preceding few sections, I unpacked how practices of negotiation were not only informed by institutional constructions of student identity, but also framed differently by Black and white teachers. In this section, I address how, according to teacher Brad Dunlay, broader school policies and practices impacted discipline and academic practices.

One of the key priorities of the Riverside leadership was to build a nurturing school culture and an environment where kids felt safe. This was reflected in Saint-John’s characterization of an ideal Riverside student, one who “really understands that the place is peaceful, and they are part of the contributors of peace” (personal communication, September 2, 2010). Given that a “culture of calm” (embodied in the Daily Harmony initiative) was prioritized in the school, it was also something that was highly negotiated, as the program was modified after its implementation due to lack of compliance. In fact, when Daily Harmony initiative began, students were expected to have one hundred days of peace before any rewards were given. However, due to lack of consistency and students not “meeting” the requirement, the necessary number of consecutive days of harmony were reduced. These changing expectations were met with serious concerns by teachers for how
these expectations registered with students. These disciplinary negotiations were seen by some teachers as not only a reflection of the expectations for students, but also a reflection of informed academic behaviors and expectations. Dunlay, the writing center and online credit recovery teacher, spoke of these practices and their ultimate effect on the academic lives of his students:

There is a lot of negotiating, and you find yourself wondering, “Why am I negotiating with this kid?” So we have these rules that are not fully enforced, and that indicates to the students, it doesn’t matter what the rule is. It indicates to the students that there is flexibility and there is room for negotiation, not only for that rule but for others. So that leads into other things, so that when we make exceptions for students for various reasons, that kind of messes up with everything. So it’s the little things, like being on time for class and uniforms and stuff like that. So there is all this negotiation between adults, between students and adults. And ultimately, in that kind of structure, students aren’t going to take anything adults say seriously. That’s just a huge waste of time when kids can’t read very well. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

When I asked Dunlay about the ultimate consequence these practices may have had on the school and the students, he stated that these flexible disciplinary practices shaped the academic behaviors of his students: “I think that academic structure stems from behavioral structure” (personal communication, October 7, 2010). In short, the structures that the school had instituted provided students with flexibility in certain arenas, such as attendance, tardiness, uniform policy, and behavior, that would invariably bleed into their work as students. Specifically, he identified the academic behavior of turning in homework
as one that was particularly complex and problematic. When asked about his position on accepting late work, Dunlay spoke of his ambivalence:

There is a lot of negotiating in terms of deadlines, and this is true for every single person I've talked to in the academic climate. Do you accept late work? And yeah, I have been thinking about that seriously for five years, and I don’t have an answer, nor am I closer to an answer. Both sides of that argument are compelling, and I just don’t know what to say. So I have ambivalence about it and many of my colleagues do. Since there is ambivalence, there is a lot of negotiation. For sure. (personal communication, October 7, 2010)

Ultimately, these practices of negotiation sent the message to students that behavior, academics, and expectations were flexible and that the accountability rested only with the adults in the building. In many ways, these practices of negotiation were tied to ultimate expectations of what benchmarks the staff thought students could or could not meet. Moreover, addressing the needs of students who were not meeting grade-level expectations called for an acceleration program to move students toward college-readiness. The programs instituted at Riverside operated under the assumption that students would not meet the expectations laid out for them and work to remediate their own behavior. These programs and policies modified expectations by diminishing student accountability.
5.4 Paving the Path to College: Navigating Tensions Between Institutional Ideologies and Thompkins’s Beliefs about Student Identity

Thus far, I have analyzed teacher discourse, department practices, and how practices are implicated in dominant ideologies and discourses. As identified in Table V (p. 121), there was variation among Riverside teachers and staff in how closely their personal convictions aligned to institutional ideologies and discourses. Jason Thompkins, while not as starkly resistant to the institution's ideologies as Jackie Reynolds, was identified in my analysis as having a “medium” alignment. In specific terms, that means that while he did not subscribe to all the beliefs surrounding student academic identity that were upheld by leaders and many school staff, he did not wholly reject all the practices and policies in the department or school. In this section, I highlight Thompkins’s conceptualization of student identity with respect to the institutional construction of identity. This is important as context for understanding the socializing practices in his classroom (in the context of the department and the school). In my presentation of Thompkins’s understanding of student identity, I present a contrast between his opinions of instructional practice, academic socialization, and student identity and the broader institutional and departmental contexts of instructional practice, academic socialization, and student identity. In Chapters 6 and 7, I examine how these two contexts gave rise to tensions between teacher and student as students negotiated classroom practices in light of the fact that student identity was constructed differentially at the institutional level than at the classroom level.

At the time that I began my study, Thompkins was in his fifth year of teaching at Riverside. He had been teaching for twelve years total. Like many of his colleagues at the school, he was committed to education, not only as a profession but also a political act. He
chose to teach at Riverside because of its mission to not only send children to college, but also help them complete post-secondary education. He wanted to help students become self-actualized and more aware of their place in the world:

> If kids don't start questioning, if kids don't question who they are, if kids don't think about their efficacy in the world, and who they are and what they can do, then my fear is that people become products of their environment. That was true of me too, and true for anybody, that if you don't really think about, sort of, who you are, what you are doing, and why you are doing it, and all that stuff, then you just sort of do things without really thinking about it. It’s sort of a political answer of why it is important to me. (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

In my observations in Thompkins’s class, I noticed a sense of community in the classroom. Many teachers, especially experienced teachers, understand the importance of deliberately creating culture within the first few weeks of every school year. With the help of trial and error, I had to learn as a teacher that students, even high school students, need to feel safe in my classroom and that it is my job to create structures, routines, and norms that support that culture. It was interesting to me that Thompkins spent little to no time establishing routines and norms in his first few weeks with his students. They—meaning Thompkins and his students—seemed to “know” each other already. This informality must often be earned between students and between teacher and student, and it begins to appear near the end of the first quarter. After his first two years at Riverside, during which he taught freshmen, Thompkins agreed to teach upper grades with the caveat that he would be able to loop with his students. As such, the senior AP Language Arts students that
Thompkins taught had been with him their freshman and sophomore years, so this was the third year with them (after they spent their junior year with a different teacher).

One of the things Thompkins struggled with was how to get students to take more ownership over their learning and to take their deadlines more seriously. Like his colleagues in the department, he was still trying to find the right balance between supporting his students in their areas of need and giving them opportunities to succeed while also ensuring that they moved toward independence. This was ever more urgent for his students because of the fact that he was teaching seniors who would be expected to pursue college the following fall. In fact because students were discursively constructed as lacking responsibility, some broader policies to address this were also gendered. Minority Mentorship Brotherhood sought to help male students with developing more academic oriented identities. When I prompted him to discuss how this dynamic of support and independence played out in gendered ways, Thompkins discussed how his own dispositions informed his approach towards his male students:

I resist a little bit, with boys, to mother them. It something within myself [that resists socio-emotional socialization and a reluctance] to acknowledge a whininess and a sleepiness. I feel like, “How are they going to make it in the world?” So I think it’s kind of, in myself, that I kind of feel this, “Urr, you don’t need this,” but I do, do it. I get much calmer responses, and often maybe they’ll drag their feet over an assignment and do it. It’s just a lot of psychology and just trying to figure out each individual student, because that’s not true for all boys, right? (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Thompkins resisted the idea that there were generalizable, gendered ways of addressing the needs of his students. Unlike O’Brien and Park, who located achievement as
they relate to external factors such as family structure and lack of male authority,

Thompkins saw gender, identity, and male achievement as more complex. When asked how he responded to and addressed the needs of the boys and girls in his class, he acknowledged gender, race, and culture as figuring in to academic behaviors, but he saw individual differences within his students as much more relevant:

I think I respond to that individual, but a lot of those things I think fall on gender. But that’s just who they are as individuals, so all these ideas about identity, which is sort of what you’re looking at, [like] how do kids form their gender identity? How do kids form their racial identity? So all these ideas come to form with who a kid is, and you figure out different ways of communicating with a child and trying to teach that kid. So I think, yeah, you might see patterns along the way, but I think it’s more of my trying to talk to the individual versus trying to say, “Here’s how to deal with girls, and here’s how I deal with boys.” (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Thompkins was not necessarily focused on locating the external reasons for how or why male students may become academically disaffected, but rather developing an individualized approach to each of his students. Specifically, he identified with respect to his male students that individual disposition and maturity were the key variance between academically successful and struggling males:

Maturity, I mean it’s maturity that the academically successful boys are, the boys who are just sort of willing to be publicly smart and are willing to do the work, but sometimes they fall off. So I can think of one who I had sophomore year and worked hard and didn’t miss any assignments, and then he went and ran away from home his junior year and it caused all sorts of problems, and he’s not at home now, and he’s at the
community college trying to get the dual credits, so his education is still important to him. But he fell off with his maturity or when he was trying to, sort of, break off from his mother and all that stuff. But I would say maturity across the lines for the successful boys. (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Thompkins did not foreground the “issues” that his students were facing as an obstacle or a roadblock to their academic success or failure. In fact, it was their level of maturity in dealing with whatever they had to deal with that was the key determinant in their success. Negotiating success and failure was first and foremost, according to Thompkins, a function of addressing individual personality, academic strengths, and needs of a student, as well as supporting independence. This was complicated, according to Thompkins, by the institutional norms that Riverside had established that privileged support and remediation:

The reality is that we spoil them. I mean, I have students, they’re always complaining about having to do work, whining to manipulate your teacher. We baby them. I mean, they are babied. And the fact that they want deadlines to constantly be changed, it doesn’t serve them well. (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Thompkins struggled with this institutional norm of foregrounding support and remediating behaviors. The struggle was brought to bear in his attitude toward the growth model. He saw the opportunities that were afforded students if they were failing, but at the same time he felt this model didn’t support student independence or foreground maturity as the impetus for change. He also found that the precarious balancing act of moving his seniors toward independence was complicated by the culture of the school:

If you look at my gradebook, there is not a rolling deadline, the zeros are there when you hand things in late. It’s just that with the growth model, institutional pressure, kids
are passing with tons of zeros in the books. (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

While he saw many of his students not turning in work, he acknowledged that the “institutional pressure” impacted the grades that he gave his students. These grades did not necessarily match the effort they had put into task completion. He did, however, see some important advantages to the growth model in that it created a paradigm shift for teachers, and in some ways it took the subjectivity of grading away from the process of evaluating students. It also shifted the focus from grades to learning:

Well, it is a struggle for me too internally, but why do I have more kids passing and why am I not in trouble for my failure rate in the same way as Jackie? Because I don’t know if [the growth model] is sufficient. So, well, all grading is subjective, so even if you’re grading and you are doing this number system, a zero is a zero, but even for the grades that are coming in, everything is subjective and my expertise with the skills, and Ted’s expertise with the skills, and Jane’s, that’s all different, and our ability to communicate that to the kids is also very different, so you get into this very abstract zone of subjectivity with grading, and that’s one thing. And second, most of the kids come in reading at a fifth- or sixth-grade level, and then you have kids at ninth grade who never meet a ninth grade standard, so how do you assess that child? Is that an F? So there’s that and there are behaviors of the kids as well. So how many kids have behaviors of saying, “Well, I am not going to do that, I am just going to give up.” Maybe there’s growth in that too. Maybe changing your attitude and your approach to learning. So that there is a debate between teacher and student: “How do I show you that I care about what I am doing to a greater degree? I’ve handed in more work that I’ve handed in, I am
starting to see that I can be effective in my learning.” (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

Thompkins saw some opportunities and advantages in the growth model, foremost that it allowed students to think about learning as perseverance. However, he also saw unique challenges in this approach to assessing students because it opened up possibilities of students’ resisting the growth model by “gaming the system.”

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, there were particular college-ready behaviors that were not explicitly addressed at Riverside, namely individual accountability and student agency. The discourse respecting achievement focused on responsiveness and teacher agency, and it did not explicitly address student agency. Thompkins identified “perseverance” as an important disposition and a strong predictor of academic success:

My thing is just [that] what makes a good student is perseverance, and that’s it. Because I think those other things fall into place when confidence comes with [regard to] that. I think academic success on some level comes with that. Because even if— so I have this one boy, who skill-wise was really low, he just [kept] working. He would get suspended his freshman and sophomore year, and he would always email me and ask about the work. And he’s improved a ton. I think I gave him an English award one year. So he’s grown, and he’s still not as high as some other kids, but he just continues to work and his confidence grew. He tried to get out of honors his freshman year, all the time, and now he knows that he belongs in AP and...there’s no question that he is going to do well in college because he just does everything. (personal communication, September 24, 2010)
The idea of “perseverance” is also connected to the identity of “responsibility,” and as Thompkins continued his reflection on student success and failure, he discussed academic responsibility and the consistent adherence to deadlines as another strong predictor of academic success:

I would say my big [evidence is] anecdotal, is that the kids who struggle with deadlines on the Senior Project aren’t in school—like half of those kids are not in school. The kids that didn’t struggle with deadlines are almost all in school. You know? That didn’t mean they didn’t struggle skill-wise, but they didn’t struggle with deadlines, they didn’t struggle with effort and consistency; those are the kids who are going to stay in school. Those are the constant, those are the types of things—it’s like teaching with a sense of urgency around that. Like this is what you need to understand, like I have four months left with you. If you don’t understand this in six months, you are going to be in college. You know? And you’re going to have to know this or you’re not going to make it even your first semester. That kind of urgency. I try to help students, I try to make it [so] that they understand that and practice that in reality. (personal communication, September 24, 2010)

According to this outlook, socio-emotional development was resultant of socialization practices that cultivate perseverance, maturity, and individual responsibility. Consistent time on-task, taking responsibility for assignments, and overall perseverance are what, according to Thompkins, allowed academic confidence to grow. Thus, cultivating positive academic identities was not a function of socio-emotional support or building confidence in students (responsiveness), but rather a function of academic behaviors that cultivated student agency. It is important to note that these are the college-ready behaviors and habits
of mind that were not explicitly addressed in the socialization model at Riverside as identified in the opening sections in this chapter. Particularly important is the fact that Thompkins perceived “academic development” as the precursor to “socio-emotional development.” The institutional model as presented in Chapter 4 assumed that socio-emotional development was the precursor to academic growth and robust academic identity. Figure 5.2 (below) is a graphic representation of Thompkins’s reflection on academic practices as articulated in the quotation above.

These tensions surfaced in the classroom with Thompkins’s students as they grappled with academic responsibility. These institutionally approved approaches may have diminished
the pathways toward academic independence. This concept is explored in further detail in Chapter 7.

### 5.4.1 Negotiating Achievement at Riverside

The policies and practices at Riverside were circumscribed by the ideological belief that students needed a positive outlook on learning and academics. These were reinforced by negotiation practices that supported academic and emotional resilience. As articulated earlier in this chapter, emotional and academic resilience were seen as necessary precursors in this trajectory of academic development. The institutional emphasis on the affective domain of development was articulated as supporting growth and protecting students from experiences that would reinforce their devalued sense of academic competency. This mechanism of “protection” was articulated through discourse as a way of addressing the needs of students. It was practiced through grading policies. Additionally, this mechanism of protection served a broader institutional purpose in that a higher rate of failure would invariably affect the school accountability metrics. Jackie Reynolds reflected on how considerations for school accountability affect potential opportunities for students:

> The administration couches the work and expectations for students as a way of protecting students from feeling like failures. [But t]hey are not protecting students, they are protecting themselves. Give [students] opportunities to be challenged and get exposure to a rigorous curriculum and see if they can handle it, and figure out how to address it if they are struggling. (personal communication, October 29, 2010)

The accountability structures and the school-reform effort writ large (as discussed in Chapter 3) inform the meaning systems within schools and become very salient
considerations for practice at all levels of a school system. Focusing so deeply on the affective domain served to protect Riverside from the broader consequence of a school closing. However, these accountability measures also worked to prioritize the institutional concerns over student growth and achievement; it became too risky to expose students to a curriculum that might have proven too challenging for them because it may have affected the failure rate of students. This perception of “risk” is both explicitly and implicitly fueled by the ideological and discursive constructions of urban, Black students. These constructions produced a tension at the classroom level, as Thompkins’s views challenged broader ideological assumptions about student success. He foregrounded academic dispositions and student agency as the pathway to college. These tensions are further explored in the following chapters, as students made sense of their academic experiences and navigated that tension.
CHAPTER 6
APPROPRIATING AND RESISTING INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY:
A CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

“Today we are celebrating our 74th day of peace. We need 26 more days to get our incentive. So, please keep up the good work. Please encourage all your kids to keep the peace every day. I also want to congratulate Tanya Caldwell. She is our excellence referral winner of the week. Tanya, please report to the main office to claim your prize. Everyone have a safe and wonderful weekend.”

- Cynthia Banks, Principal at Riverside College Prep, end-of-day announcement, January 14, 2011

In exploring socialization toward college-readiness at Riverside College Prep, I have explicated how the prevailing missionary and deficit ideologies of school leaders and some teachers gave rise to academic practices that privileged the idea of “growth” as a key concept in and a measure of students’ socio-emotional development. These intersecting ideologies—fueled by deficit-based philosophies about Black students, their families, and their communities—emerged in practices of remediation at the institutional level and as practices of negotiation at the classroom level.

As I described in Chapter 4, it was the unfolding relationships among discourse, ideology, and practice at Riverside that also revealed how staff and many of the teachers framed and constructed students’ racial, gender, and academic identities. The prevailing discourse concerning poverty, urban revitalization, cultural deficits of students, and resilience gave rise to institutional policies and practices that attempted to remediate perceived cultural belief systems about academics, school behaviors, and academic fragility of students in order to support college-readiness. In Chapter 5, I discussed how teachers framed students’ academic, racial, and gender identities through discourse centered on support, compassion, and growth. These conceptualizations were reflected in negotiation
practices, specifically classroom- and departmental-level negotiations of grades and academic expectations. The institutional construction of student identity gave rise to practices that functioned to address these identities.

In this chapter, I utilize a cross-case analysis to deconstruct how racialized and gendered constructions of students were appropriated, contested, and resisted by students. The cross-case analysis illustrates how students’ stories and experiences, in some instances, serve as a counter-narrative to the larger institutional narratives of student achievement, academic success, and academic identity at Riverside. Stake (2000) referred to this procedure as a collective case study, whose primary purpose is to “provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (p. 437). The use of cross-case analysis allows me to more substantively discuss the range of responses generated and enacted by students about their academic identities, thus highlighting key omissions and limitations of the institutional model of academic identity as well as the complex identities that students displayed at Riverside. For example, the overwhelming majority of students appropriated the college-readiness discourse at the school, but many student responses also challenged the discourse concerning resilience and lack of family support. My cross-case analysis foregrounds student agency, intentionality, and choice in terms of the missionary and deficit ideologies present at the school. As discussed in Chapter 5, “resilience,” “responsibility,” and “school knowledge” were identity characteristics that were explicitly addressed at Riverside either through ideology, discourse, or practice. These characteristics were the foundational assumptions that propelled academic socialization at Riverside. In this chapter, I examine how students situated themselves relative to these characteristics. My analysis of student interviews reveals that students showed strong
resilience and displayed strong knowledge of Riverside’s expectations and the realities of college. In the area of “responsibility,” there was no consistent trend in student responses. I argue that, considering the academic socialization practices that privileged socio-emotional socialization in order to cultivate resilience, senior leadership and some teachers, de-emphasized other college-ready identities or habits of mind, specifically academic responsibility. As I alluded in Chapter 5, this over-emphasis of resilience, as evidenced by the growth model, allowed students to enact their agency, as this was the area in academic socialization practices at Riverside where there was “flexibility.” As such, practices of remediation and negotiation at both the institutional and departmental level, respectively, were actualized in student behaviors and academic identities. Equally important, my analysis of case studies in Chapter 7 highlights how the academic identities that were made available to students at Riverside may have constrained opportunities for enhancing their academic development. These cases raise questions about how to fully address the needs of students who don’t fit the academic identity characteristics that are deliberately cultivated and supported, i.e., the institutional construction of identity. I argue that this calls for more complex ways of thinking about college-readiness in urban contexts.

6.1 Problematizing Academic Socialization at Riverside: Over-Emphasizing Performative Stances

This chapter’s opening quotation was drawn from an announcement over the intercom by the principal, Cynthia Banks, to her students at Riverside. This instance reflected the staff’s ideological orientation, which strove to remediate cultural practices while under-valuing and under-developing the critical engagement and intellectual sophistication of
students at Riverside. Banks’ congratulatory remarks over the PA system signaled not only the end of a peaceful semester, but also the behavioral expectations for students at Riverside. Excellence referrals and rewards reflected a behavioral modification system that encouraged performative responses from students. In essence, those students who adhered to the behavioral standards in school were singled out as being noteworthy and different. This “difference” in behavior can be characterized as a student who does not engage in fighting, punctually attends class, consistently wears his or her uniform, and does not get written up by his or her teachers for behavioral issues. In short, these behaviors, which can be viewed as standard operating procedure for many students that attend high schools writ large, were considered exceptional at Riverside. Consequently, I argue that this practice of providing external rewards for “exceptional” behavior infantilized students by instituting developmentally inappropriate practices. As a case for consideration, my colleague at another school, Meghan Peterson, would provide incentives for her students, including a pizza party at the week’s end if they adhered to specific types of behavior that she laid out, such as raising hands to talk, taking turns, and standing straight in a single file line, i.e., behaviors connected to classroom and school procedure. By the end of the week, if they met her expectations, they would have a pizza party. She taught kindergarten. Knowing that such practices reveal viewpoints about student engagement, it is important to consider how engagement was conceptualized at Riverside.

In Chapter 4, I considered how college-readiness and resilience were a defining mission, undergirded by cultural assumptions about urban contexts and Black students. In this instance, student engagement was practiced and undergirded by an assumption that students were not familiar with practices of schooling, such that rewards systems were
intended to acclimate students at Riverside to particular patterns of school behaviors. Most importantly, these reward systems are more appropriate for much younger students.

At Riverside, these reward systems were tied to *performative stances*. By performative stance, I mean the action-oriented behaviors that I described earlier, such as getting to class on time. Because identity formation involves behavior and performance, these reward systems represented direct attempts to shape and condition students’ identities into the forms that teachers deemed most relevant and important for students. These performative stances did not consider the intellectual sophistication and complex identities of Riverside student as adolescents and as young adults. When viewed as a socializing mechanism, these reward systems did not support the academic habits of independence, self-regulation, and intrinsic motivation, i.e., practices that reinforced conceptualization of students as agents of change in their environment. As a result, the school failed to capitalize on opportunities to engage students with their identities as adolescent learners and young adults about to emerge into the world. An alternative system of rewards could have provided a unique opportunity for students to engage critically as leaders in their school community and as future college students. The vehicle for this alternative system could have included service learning projects or academic enrichment programs to extend learning.

In Chapter 5, I identified the specific academic identities that were available to students at Riverside. These specific characterizations of Riverside students served as the prototypes that led to the development of institutional policies and practices designed to support the college-readiness mission. Table VII (next page) is a reminder of how various levels of the system contribute to cultivating and supporting this narrow construction of academic identity, as well as how students reflected on their academic identities.
### Institutional Constructions of Academic Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lacked Resilience</th>
<th>Growth Model (P)</th>
<th>Socio-emotional support from staff (P)</th>
<th>Minority Mentorship Brotherhood (P)</th>
<th>Deficit Orientation (I)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacked Responsibility</td>
<td>Socio-emotional support from staff (P)</td>
<td>Teachers as proxy for family (D)</td>
<td>SBI (P)</td>
<td>Growth Model (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacked Knowledge of School Practices and College-Ready Behaviors</td>
<td>Rising Stars (P)</td>
<td>SBI (P)</td>
<td>Daily Harmony (P)</td>
<td>Deficit Orientation (D)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Identity Reflected in: Discourse (D), Ideology (I), or Practice (P) (Academic Socialization)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I think I am a pretty good student. I was on the honor roll in eighth grade, and I have always done well in school.” Tina Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I knew I didn’t belong in a neighborhood school.” Tanya Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am definitely someone who will get the work done, no matter what. I need things to be done right.” Keisha Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sometimes I get kinda lazy.” Keisha Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My mother said it was a good school and it would help me get into college...I see myself in medical school in five years. I want to be a doctor.” Madison Williamson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My mom wanted me to attend Riverside cuz it is a college prep school and [she] wanted me to have good opportunities.” Ebony Johnson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### College-Readiness Identities Not Addressed in Discourse, Ideology, or Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual responsibility/agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual rigor through acceleration: increasing level of rigor in tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for acceleration through consistent and repeated practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplined approach to academic tasks and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability for academic behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for acceleration through consistent and repeated practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual enrichment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally appropriate incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE VII. Academic Socialization, Institutional Construction of Identity, and Student Responses**
6.2 Students’ Academic Identities: Resisting and Appropriating Dominant Discourses

The key characteristics of the institutional construction of identity, as identified in Table VII, were (1) lack of resilience; (2) lack of responsibility; and (3) lack of knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors (on the part of both students and their families). In an attempt to get a sense of how students characterized their academic identities, I interviewed all the students, individually, in Jason Thompkins’s AP English Language Arts class. The interviews included 10 girls and three boys. The interviews were approximately 30 to 45 minutes in duration. Interviews with the case study participants in Chapter 7 (James Sullivan and Leroy Blackwell) were longer in duration, lasting between one and one and a half hours, supplemented by several additional informal interviews. Through all of these interviews, I attempted to get a sense of the students’ affective responses to schooling at Riverside, how they felt about their identities as students (both historically and at Riverside), and the degree to which their families had been involved in the application process. The purpose of these interviews was to get a broad sense of student academic identities in order to identify general trends and patterns as well as show variance across responses. In doing so, I want to demonstrate how students, within the context of institutional ideologies and practices, would in some instances contest these narratives and in others appropriate them, but, ultimately, would exhibit agency.

The class profile of student identities represented in Table VIII (next two pages) identifies how students responded relative to the institutional construction of identity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Resilience</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>School Knowledge</th>
<th>Post-Secondary Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina Brown</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in grammar school and high school</td>
<td>Low responsibility: Inconsistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in application process; sought Riverside because of its college-ready mission</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine Thomas</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in grammar school and high school</td>
<td>High responsibility: Consistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in application process; actively sought out Riverside because it was a good school</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya Davis</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in grammar school and high school</td>
<td>Low responsibility: Inconsistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in the application process; sought Riverside because of its college-ready mission</td>
<td>Community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha James</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in high school but not grammar school</td>
<td>Low responsibility: Inconsistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in decision making process; attended Riverside because friends and family attended</td>
<td>Community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Benson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in high school and grammar school</td>
<td>High responsibility: Consistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in application process; attended Riverside because it was better than her neighborhood school</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcela Jackson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in high school and grammar school</td>
<td>High responsibility: Consistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in decision making process; came to Riverside because she was recruited</td>
<td>Community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethany Smith</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in high school but not grammar school</td>
<td>Low responsibility: Inconsistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in application process; came to Riverside because of the college-ready mission</td>
<td>Community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Academic Identity</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Family Support</td>
<td>Education Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebony Johnson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in high school and grammar school</td>
<td>High responsibility: Consistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in application process; came to Riverside because her cousin attended</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron Smith</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in high school and grammar school</td>
<td>High responsibility: Inconsistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in application process; decided to attend Riverside because she wanted a good education</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Sullivan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in grammar school and high school</td>
<td>Low responsibility: Inconsistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in application process; decided to attend Riverside because it was better than his neighborhood school</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leroy Blackwell</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in grammar school and high school</td>
<td>Low responsibility: Inconsistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in application process; decided to attend Riverside because it was better than his neighborhood school</td>
<td>College Plans to attend graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan Taylor</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Weak academic identity in grammar school and strong academic identity in high school</td>
<td>Low responsibility: Consistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Low family support in application process; decided to attend Riverside because it was a good school</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison Williamson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Strong academic identity in grammar school and high school</td>
<td>High responsibility: Consistently completes tasks and homework assignments</td>
<td>Strong family support in the application process; decided to attend Riverside because it was better than her neighborhood school</td>
<td>Four-year university Plans to attend medical school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE VIII. Class Profile of Student Academic Identities
The short interviews with students were not intended to gather in-depth information about student academic identities, but rather were intended to provide a broad snapshot of a cross-section of the class. Furthermore, these responses should not be seen as static representations of identities, but understood with the knowledge that students move in and out of practices and identities in class. The class profile should be considered as one data point that may reflect a potential misalignment between student identities and the ways in which the institution (through practices, ideology, and discourse) addressed academic identities and achievement at Riverside.

In Chapter 4, I unpacked how, to some degree, practices of remediation emerged from conceptualizations of students as “academically fragile” and having poor self-concept about their abilities. At Riverside, a dominant conception of students exhibited by administrators and some teachers was that the students lacked resilience. To gain insight on student resilience, I asked students: “What kind of student do you think you are?” and “Do you think you are a capable student?” I intentionally kept the former question open-ended so as to get the most authentic response from students and not to guide them to a particular response. These questions were not necessarily intended to elicit responses about the students’ academic behaviors, but they were intended to elicit more affective responses about how they viewed themselves as learners. If students responded positively by saying, for example, “I think I am a pretty good student,” or, “I think I am smart,” or, “I do well in school,” then they were coded as having resilience or a robust academic identity. This coding does not necessarily reflect how they actually performed in school or their practices in class, but rather the responses displayed confidence in their abilities or academic competencies.
Another assumption by Riverside administrators and some teachers about their students was that the students lacked knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors—a shortfall that was attributed, to some degree, on an assumption of cultural deficit, i.e., the students came from schools that did not cultivate certain school behaviors or families did not have knowledge of what it meant for their children to go to college. An example of a practice stemming from this assumption was the Rising Stars program. To get a sense of family engagement and support, I posed this question to students: “Did your parent or guardian support your decision to attend Riverside? Why or why not?” To get a sense of their future plans, I posed this question: “Where do you see yourself in five years?” I was looking for indications of parental involvement and the student’s desire or ambition to attend college or a post-secondary institution. If student responses indicated that their parents had supported their decision to go to college, that their parents wanted them to attend Riverside because of its college-readiness mission, or that the students displayed ambitions to go to college or graduate from college, I coded those responses as having strong school knowledge and college-ready behaviors. With this category of responses, I was not attempting to gain an in-depth sense of how students participated in college-bound practices at school, but rather a rough sense of family involvement and ambition to go to college.

A final assumption by Riverside administrators and some teachers about their students was that they lacked academic responsibility due to a lack of family structures as well as a lack of confidence in their own abilities. These were addressed through particular policies and practices (see Table VII, p. 155). In order to get a sense of how students perceived their academic engagement, I posed questions that addressed their work completion, both in and
out of the classroom, such as “Do you complete all your homework assignments?” “Do you participate in class?” “How often do you complete work in class?” These responses were also triangulated with the classroom observation data I collected throughout the course of the year. I coded responses as “inconsistently completing homework assignments or classroom tasks” if students did not complete classroom tasks consistently, i.e., they did not complete three or more classroom tasks across the course of one month of classroom observations (four instances of classroom observation). It can be argued that, since I was only in the classroom once a week, it would be difficult to assess “consistency” of task completion and the data was just an anomaly. However, I also looked for lack of task completion across the course of a month and not in one single observation. In two cases, students did not complete three tasks over the course of one classroom observation. However, if the data indicated that they completed tasks throughout the course of other observations that month, they were not coded as having inconsistent task completion. Table 6.2 (next page) illustrates students’ responses as a proxy for their conceptualization of their own academic identity.

The trends in the interviews and some of the classroom observation data indicate that the majority of students had a:

- positive academic identity in high school;
- positive academic identity throughout the course of their academic career;
- knowledge of college-ready behaviors; and
- strong parental involvement in many cases.

The only area that showed any inconsistency across the board was the area of “responsibility.” However, given that accountability for academic behaviors was
underprivileged relative to other “school-ready” behaviors (performative stances), these data are consistent with the description of socialization previously theorized in Chapter 5. Specifically, the developmental trajectory toward college-readiness necessitated a cultivation of socio-emotional development and a cultivation of resilience. It is important to note that there was no strong connection between “resilience” and “responsibility,” i.e., even students who considered themselves “good students” did not necessarily attest to consistent work completion. I argue that the model for academic socialization at Riverside failed to provide enough accountability measures (as the academic domain was under-privileged) for students, as reflected in their inconsistent task completion. Through my analysis, I argue that addressing identities of resilience, and lack of school knowledge and practices, may have constrained opportunities for cultivating “responsibility.” It is also important to note that while these were AP students, it could be argued that they were different from other students at Riverside, who may have needed a more guided approach to instruction. It is also important to consider, however, that a more differentiated approach to socialization and college-readiness would have addressed the needs of these particular students.

6.3 Resilient Learners at Riverside: Students’ Positive Academic Identities

The work of supporting resilience as identified in the previous chapters was an attempt in some ways to “protect” students from activities, tasks, and experiences that would reinforce notions that students may have had about their own competence. One example of this is allowing “flexibility” in compliance with task completion or flexibility with department outcomes, which Ted O’Brien identified as an important consideration for
these particular students (as compared to their more well-resourced peers in other schools). This protective stance was also exemplified through the growth model, an approach that was couched by some teachers as an opportunity for students to negotiate expectations. For Jackie Reynolds, these practices of supporting resilience were perceived as a mechanism for protecting institutional interests. For Brad Dunlay, these practices allowed for too much negotiation with students over behaviors and academic policies. These counter-narratives or critiques by teachers of policies and programs that over-emphasized resilience were either silenced or dismissed by administrators. Counter to how many staff and teachers conceptualized students’ (in)ability to think of themselves as resilient learners, all of the students I interviewed in Jason Thompkins’s class indicated they were academically resilient. While this may be attributable to the socializing practices at Riverside, it is equally important to note that many of the students saw themselves as engaged and motivated learners even before they entered high school. In fact, only two respondents stated that they did not see themselves as good students before they attended Riverside. Below are representative responses indicating how students made sense of their own identities as learners in elementary school:

Ansari: What kind of student do you think you were in elementary school?

Tina Brown: I think I am a pretty good student. I was on the honor roll in eighth grade, and I have always done well in school, and Riverside was a good step in helping me get to college. (personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Jasmine Thomas: The reason I chose Riverside College Prep was because I knew that I didn’t belong in a neighborhood school. I always did really well in school. (personal communication, January 14, 2011)
Tanya Davis: I am a pretty good student, and in grammar school, I always made the honor roll. (personal communication, January 21, 2011)

Cameron Smith: I just knew that I didn’t belong in a neighborhood school. I always got good grades and stuff. Like at Riverside, you just get a sense of family, and my cousin came here and she said it was peaceful. (personal communication, January 21, 2011)

Madison Williamson: My grammar school really prepared me for what was going on in high school. When I got here, I was like, I am ready. (personal communication, January 28, 2011)

Bethany Smith: For me [my experience in grammar school] was different, cuz like in grammar school, I was never on the honor roll, I got okay grades, but I mean it wasn’t nothing compared to my grades here. (personal communication, January 28, 2011)

The students’ understanding of their academic competencies in grammar school, or what it meant to be a “good student,” was positive overall. This positive attitude toward their academic competency was also reflected in their articulated understanding of their experiences in high school. It is important to note that while there was some slight variation in how students perceived themselves as students in elementary school (two students did not see themselves as good students), all of Thompkins’s students thought themselves to be good students at Riverside. Below are representative student responses:

   Ansari: What kind of student do you think you are now? Do you think you are a capable student?
   Nathan Taylor: I don’t always do my work, but I know that I can do it. It’s challenging sometimes, but yeah, I think I am capable. (personal communication, February 4, 2011)
Madison Williamson: I think I am a pretty good student, and the work at Riverside was not very challenging. I almost always got my stuff done before the due date. I really don’t feel challenged because I came from a grammar school that prepared me so much, so my freshman year, my sophomore year, my whole junior year, it was kind of a breeze for me. While other students were struggling, like “This is too much work,” I was like, “I did this already, I am already kinda used to this.” (personal communication, January 28, 2011)

Marcela Jackson: I think I am a very good student. I don’t struggle with stuff the way some other kids do. (personal communication, February 4, 2011)

It is important to consider not just how students considered themselves as high school students, but also how they viewed themselves throughout the course of their academic career. These responses suggest that students entered Riverside with a strong sense of academic competence, and furthermore that this confidence was buttressed by the fact that they may have considered themselves as different from their peers, a conception that was suggested in several student interviews (Madison Williamson, Marcela Jackson, Jasmine Thomas). Furthermore, the Riverside students’ academic identities as future college students were also evident in their responses, as represented below:

Ansari: Why did you decide to attend Riverside?

Marcela Jackson: Well, I wanted to go to college and my cousin went here, and it is a college prep school, and I didn’t want to go to my neighborhood school. (personal communication, February 4, 2011)

Ebony Johnson: I came here because my brother went here and it’s a good school and they really help you get in to college (personal communication, January 25, 2011)
The connection between how students saw themselves in relation to their peers is important in considering why and how they chose Riverside. As their testimony suggests, many students were intrinsically motivated to go to college, and they sought academic opportunities that would put them on that path. While it can be argued that students at Riverside were socialized into perceiving themselves as college-going students, the responses indicated that students were intentional about choosing Riverside because it was a college prep institution. Thus, while students may have appropriated the discourse of college-readiness from the efforts of Riverside staff, the student responses indicate that they were intentional about why they chose to attend the school. Salient ideas can be drawn from these responses, namely that students at Riverside (1) saw themselves as different from their peers; (2) had a history of being successful students in their academic careers; and (3) were working toward achieving long-term academic goals and making intentional choices that would help get them achieve said goals. They also articulated some underlying implicit assumptions about who their own identities in relation to “other” students who may not be as intrinsically motivated as themselves.

### 6.4 Academic Responsibility: Protecting Students From Expectations

Another assumption of the administrators and some teachers about Riverside students, identified through the *institutional construction of identity*, was that students lacked independence, responsibility, and motivation. However, my analysis suggests that many Riverside students showed initiative and motivation through their decision to apply to and attend Riverside. The school instituted policies that emphasized the affective domain, such as the growth model. The growth model, at the institutional level, was explicitly intended to
address academic fragility in the spirit of responsive teaching. However, it was also secondarily implemented to address failure rates due to lack of task and homework completion. The growth model allowed for more flexibility with deadlines thus decreasing the percentage of failures in the school, and reflected a higher overall GPA of the student body. As discussed in the conclusion of Chapter 5, grades and failure rates were also tied to institutional interests. As a result of teachers de-emphasizing homework completion as well as task completion in the classroom, students had more flexibility around academic expectations within the classroom were given more flexibility with academics inside a classroom. Potentially, students were deprived of opportunities for needed practice of a skill or task. In fact, given that many teachers and staff emphasized on growth, as suggested in the Table VII (p. 164), college-ready behaviors not addressed in teacher practices were missed opportunities for acceleration through repeated practice, individual accountability, and academic independence. When students reflected on their work habits, an overwhelming majority of responses suggested that students were internally motivated and driven (“good students”), but when it came to task completion, student responses suggest that many struggled with homework or task completion regardless of their articulated internal motivations. Below are some representative responses to how students reflected on their academic engagement:

Ansari: Do you complete your homework assignments and tasks in the classroom?

Keisha Jones: I think I am a pretty good student. Sometimes I get kinda lazy and don’t complete all my assignments, but for the most part I do what needs to be done. I am not looking to get behind. I’ll catch up if I am falling off. (personal communication, February 25, 2011)
Laura Benson: Well, I would say I am sorta good. Not great. But I wouldn’t ever be satisfied with a C. That’s just not me. I almost always try and stay ahead. Like if I have time at the end of the period, I will do my homework for the next day. (personal communication, February 25, 2011)

Marcela Jackson: I am definitely someone who will get the work done, no matter what. I need things to be done right. (personal communication, February 4, 2011)

Tanya Davis: My problem is that I always do things last-minute. Last semester I had to do a lot of make-up work at the end of the semester to get my grades up. But I know that I will always get a second chance with my teachers. (personal communication, January 21, 2011)

Tina Brown: Yeah, I try to do my homework, but I gotta admit, that’s not something I do all the time. (personal communication, January 14, 2011)

As seen through the class profile and the student responses above, many students struggled with task completion. Teachers and staff in the English department addressed lack of task completion through practices and policies undergirded by assumptions of academic and emotional fragility—teachers attempted to build strong academic identities by cultivated strong relationships with students and through initiatives like Mentoring Brotherhood. Furthermore, accountability was not emphasized. As such, I argue that addressing certain identities may have created obstacles for supporting academic responsibility. As referenced in Chapter 5, some teachers couched lack of work completion as resultant of lack of father figures, especially when it came to the male students at Riverside. Consequently, many teachers sought to cultivate positive relationships with their students as an attempt to compensate for what students may have been lacking at
home, namely strong family structures and father figures who would enforce accountability structures. Below are student responses that indicate that this emphasis on the affective domain filtered through to students’ attitudes about teachers at Riverside:

Ansari: What is your relationship like with your teachers?

Tina Brown: I would say that most of my teachers really care about me, not just as a student, but as a person. They, like, want to be there for you. (personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Bethany Smith: I have a good relationship with my teachers. It is like a family here. Even with the other kids here, we are a pretty small senior class, and I have had classes with most of these guys throughout my time here. We are pretty close. (personal communication, January 28, 2011)

Jasmine Thomas: My teachers can be a real pain sometimes, but that is when I am not doing my work, I think they really care about making sure I do well. (personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Marcela Jackson: A lot of the teachers here are really different from the ones I had in grammar school. They really care about you. Like, if I am having a bad day, they will ask “What is going on?” And I can always go the counselor to talk about stuff. (personal communication February 4, 2011)

When I asked, “What was your most positive experience at Riverside?” three students—Leroy Blackwell, Nathan Taylor, and Ebony Smith—cited relationships with teachers as being the most salient experience. Furthermore, these experiences were different from what they had experienced in elementary school. It is clear that students at Riverside felt strong connections with their teachers and, in some cases, this was markedly different
from their experiences at previous schools. My analysis indicates that the emphasis on socio-emotional development and relationship-building was indeed addressed at the student level at Riverside. In fact, many students characterized their relationships in ways that were more “family-oriented,” which indicates that the school administrators and staff explicitly cultivated relationships with students in nurturing and responsive ways. My analysis also suggests that the socialization practices at Riverside promoted inconsistent work behaviors, as there was no clear accountability structure for addressing task and homework completion.

6.5 School Knowledge and Behaviors: Families as Cultural and Academic Capital

Another underlying assumption of the administrators and some teachers about students at Riverside, reflected in the institutional policies and programs, was that families may have constituted a roadblock to academic growth, or at the very least (as seen through the Rising Stars program) families may have not effectively prioritized college if it meant students would not be living at home. However, the overwhelming majority of students I interviewed stated that their families were fully invested in sending them to college and had been instrumental in helping them make the decision to attend Riverside. These counter-stories at Riverside are extremely important to consider because they upend the larger ideologies and discourses concerning student achievement and college-readiness. While many institutional practices and policies strove to acclimate students to the mere idea of going to college, which was sustained by a deficit ideology about students’ and parents’ knowledge and attitudes toward college, the students’ stories overwhelmingly suggested that students appropriated Riverside’s discourse of college-readiness. More
importantly, it was also something that they had intentionally sought before they came to the school, further supporting the idea that students in Thompkins’s class had a willingness to go to college and, it could be argued, at least some knowledge of what that entailed. Below are student responses indicating that students were invested in their education and the goal of attending college:

Ebony Johnson: My mom wanted me to attend Riverside cuz it is a college prep school and [she] wanted me to have good opportunities. (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

Cameron Smith: I found out about this school through my cousin and my brother. They both attended, and they liked it here. My parents wanted me to attend. They know the school, and it’s a good school. (personal communication, January 21, 2011)

Laura Benson: My mom wanted me to come here so I could go to college, and she didn’t want me in a neighborhood school. (personal communication, February 25, 2011)

Tina Brown: I wanted to come to Riverside because some of my friends from my neighborhood school came here. My parents helped me get my application in and they really want me to go to a good college. (personal communication, January 14, 2011)

In my interviews with the students in Thompkins’s class, I found that the overwhelming majority stated that their families wanted better educational opportunities for them and were very supportive in their decision to attend Riverside. The college-prep mission was the most frequent response I received when I asked students why their parent or guardian wanted them to attend the school.

As seen through the class profile, all the students in Thompkins’s class had plans for post-secondary education (with the exception of Nathan Taylor, who planned to enter the
military), and many students had families who supported their decision to attend Riverside specifically because of its college mission (Tina Brown, Tanya Davis, Bethany Smith) or because they wanted better educational opportunities than were readily available at the neighborhood school (Jasmine Thomas, Laura Benson, James Sullivan, Madison Williamson). This suggests that students’ identities as learners were not incongruent with their racial or cultural identities. Student responses indicated that from the outset, they were determined to go to college and they actively pursued opportunities that would put them on the pathway to attending a college or university. Furthermore, many of the responses indicated that parents or families were heavily involved either in the decision-making process when students were considering what high school to attend or in the application process for high school admission (all respondents claimed their parents or guardians helped them with applying or looking for schools, with the exception of Nathan Taylor).

6.6 Problematizing Academic Socialization at Riverside

It may be argued that the trends that emerged in the class profile were not reflective of the overall population at Riverside, as these were AP students and they may have served as outliers. However, it is important to consider that these particular students (namely AP students who were intrinsically and academically motivated) may have needed a different approach to college-readiness than their peers at Riverside. It is not my argument that some students may not have needed the guided approach that the institution and most of the staff adopted; rather, I argue that it was not a need of all students at Riverside College Prep. The nature of academic socialization at Riverside, at the expense of addressing rigor
and instilling critical habits of mind, supported perceived fragile academic identities and privileged growth as the ultimate academic outcome for Riverside students. I emphasize growth as an academic outcome rather than as a necessary pathway toward academic success because growth was over-emphasized in the academic socialization processes at Riverside and, I argue, at the expense of academic skill enhancement. It is also important to consider that socio-emotional socialization was the “dominant” form of socialization as revealed through the lack of differentiation in socialization processes for students who did not exhibit academic fragility. This lack of differentiation presented an important and salient challenge for the school, revealing gaps in the provision of opportunities to enhance and enrich the academic identities of Riverside students.
CHAPTER 7

GAMING THE SYSTEM:
NEGOTIATING PRACTICES OF COLLEGE-READINESS

“Basically, I slacked off, you know? They say seniors check out early because it is senior year. I wrote in one of my reflections, 'I never checked in.' Because basically I have been doing the same thing I have been doing since I was little.”

- James Sullivan, AP English student at Riverside College Prep

In the previous chapters, I discussed how institutional discourses, ideologies, and practices mediated academic identities for students at Riverside College Prep. In Chapter 6, I analyzed how these ideological constructions were both resisted and appropriated through student narratives and experiences. The cross-case analysis served to illustrate broad trends relative to the institutional construction of student identities as well as to uncover some tensions and constraints that emerged between socialization practices that only addressed these limited academic identities with respect to academic development and college-readiness. In this chapter, through a case-study approach, I examine how two students—James Sullivan and Leroy Blackwell—who were positioned alternately at the periphery and the center of academic practices in Jason Thompkins's AP English class made sense of their experiences in school. Case studies allowed me to collect “in-depth information in a natural setting” (Yin, 2008, p. 112) while illuminating emerging issues of academic socialization at Riverside.

By center of practice—which characterizes the primary positioning of James Sullivan—I refer to his grades in class, his high level of participation in classroom discussions, and his mastery of skills relative to the instructional outcomes set forth by his teacher. By periphery of practice—which characterizes the primary positioning of Leroy Blackwell—I
refer to his near failing grades near the end of the second and third quarter of that year. However, it should be noted that both Sullivan and Blackwell, because they exercised their academic agency, did not always acquiesce to these social positions. They moved in and out of the center and periphery depending on context and the practice. For example, while Sullivan participated quite often in class discussions, in many moments throughout the year, he was off-task and did not complete his homework assignments or in class assignments. Blackwell, while he participated very frequently in class discussions, would often arrive late to class, and not complete his work.

My cross-case analysis in Chapter 6 highlighted that student-level data complicated and partly disrupted the institutional constructions of student identity. Rather than lacking resilience, all students in Thompkins’s class demonstrated academic resilience. However, with respect to the “responsibility” characteristic, the trends were inconsistent; students who demonstrated high levels of academic resilience and/or school knowledge did not necessarily show academic responsibility. This is reflective of the dominant modes of academic socialization at Riverside, which privileged the affective, socio-emotional domain of academic socialization and therefore did not pay as much attention to academic accountability and responsibility. Consequently, expectations for students were frequently negotiated, which may act as a detriment to academic responsibility.

The cases of James Sullivan and Leroy Blackwell highlight the ways in which this “identity” of being academically responsible became problematic for these particular students and how the socialization practices at Riverside may have informed this aspect (responsibility) of their academic identities. I chose these cases because they problematize the institutional discourse, ideologies, and practices surrounding academic socialization at
Riverside, and they represent one kind of variation in the classroom relative to skill level and academic competency. In the case of James Sullivan, the emphasis on “growth” and the utilization of the growth model constrained opportunities for academic mastery through consistent practice on challenging tasks. This chapter’s opening quotation, spoken by Sullivan and constituting his reflection on his experience at Riverside, alludes to the lack of accountability that he experienced, which is further explored in my analysis in this chapter.

The focus on socio-emotional socialization and “flexibility” led to tensions between Blackwell and his teacher, Thompkins. It also gave rise to negotiation of classroom expectations and grades in the case of Leroy Blackwell. Specifically, Blackwell’s case problematizes the emphasis of both performative stances as well socio-emotional support at Riverside.

I also highlight these two cases because of the problematic ways that Black male achievement is addressed institutionally through a deficit model, which constructs adolescent Black male learners as (1) lacking father figures; (2) seeing academic achievement or intelligence as undesirable; (3) lacking academic motivation; and (4) being academically “fragile.” Black male achievement at Riverside, within the context of socio-emotional support, was addressed through the school-wide initiative of Minority Mentorship Brotherhood and SBI, policies that were upheld by ideologies of cultural deficit. The Minority Mentorship Brotherhood initiative strove to prevent violence among boys as well as to instill strong intellectual identities, e.g., reframing intellectual and academic engagement as something that was a positive and desirable aspect of a strong male identity. However, neither Sullivan nor Blackwell displayed any behavioral issues. Additionally, both were active participants in class discussion and did not shy away from
their identities as “good students” (something addressed by the Minority Mentorship Brotherhood initiative). Furthermore, the work of supporting emotional development was circumscribed by ideological beliefs about “poverty” and “cultural deficit.” In the case of both Blackwell and Sullivan, they utilize the socialization practices as they see fit. They also resist the *institutional construction of identity* with respect to resilience as they both consider themselves to be good students and do not display academic confidence (as reflected in their interviews).

7.1 “I Never Checked In”: The Discourse of Growth as a Constraint to Academic Mastery

When I first sat down to interview James Sullivan, the first thing that struck me was his baby face and a smirk that bespoke mischief. Despite his tall and lanky frame, which towered above everyone else in his class, the immediate impression that Sullivan gave off was that he is goofy; this boy would do anything to get a laugh. Sullivan referred to himself as the class clown; he would distract the class with a joke when he got bored—which he often did—always one quip away from derailing a class discussion. His classmates and his teacher described him as good-natured. He was the kind of student who could defuse a situation through a smile or a clever remark. According to Sullivan, he had been told all his life that he needed to live up to his potential and that his work did not reflect what he could actually do. Sullivan saw himself as having untapped potential that he would eventually get around to using. He described his work habits as inconsistent and his engagement in class as a function of how and what he felt like doing at the moment. Below are my field notes.
from three different classroom observations, offering a sample of Sullivan’s engagement in class:

The class is pretty well organized. Two students walk in and start passing out grammar books. Jason is sitting at one of the tables, and as students walk in he asks them to settle in and do their bellwork...most of the students are working, but [Sullivan] is listening to his iPod and seems to be drifting off into space. [Jason Thompkins] goes to his desk to take attendance, and [Sullivan] begins his bell work, about two minutes after everyone else has started. (November 3, 2010, 2:30 P.M.)

Everyone is pretty quiet. Jason is walking around to each table to [conference] with students about their papers. They are working on a [literacy analysis]. [Sullivan] is sitting quietly doing nothing. He gets up to sharpen his pencil. He is walking to the back of classroom to [the bookshelf], looks around, kind of aimlessly, and walks back and starts to read (not the task they should be doing). (November 19, 2010, 3:05 P.M.)

[Tompkins]: “So yesterday we talked about ‘bougie’ and where that came from, we talked about etymology, which means history of a word. So the word ‘bourgeois’ is middle-class, and the term ‘bougie’ is now racialized and acting white...so I am thinking it is kind of like what Bill Cosby was doing...he says the idea of race shouldn’t be thought of anymore, so in your [critical journals] write about whether you agree with this argument.” [Sullivan] seems to not be listening. He is flipping through his journal. It takes him a minute to start writing. [Thompkins] goes around the room to collect reflections from the class. [Sullivan] does not have his reflection.

(December 10, 2010, 3:16 P.M.)
These set of observations indicate that Sullivan was not academically engaged in class and furthermore that he may not have been academically challenged. Sullivan knows what he should be doing and why, but for some reason or another, he does not always feel the urgency to do it well or with a consistent amount of focus through a sustained period of time. Sullivan is the ultimate procrastinator, as he readily admits, and he shows inconsistent intellectual engagement with academic practices. By intellectual engagement, I am referring to time on task, active participation in small-group and large-group discussion, work completion, and homework completion, as well as quality of work and time spent on classroom tasks. In the following sections, I highlight how Sullivan’s responses with respect to academic resilience resist the discursive construction of academically fragile identity and additionally how the focus on socio-emotional socialization through the use of the growth model allowed Sullivan to take advantage of the grading system, and how practices in the classroom did not provide enough academic challenges for Sullivan.

7.1.1 “I Do the Things That Make Me Smart Enough to Get By”: James Sullivan’s Academic Resilience

Sullivan attended an elementary school near Riverside College Prep’s neighborhood. When it came time to choose a high school, he applied and was accepted to Riverside as well as one of the top-tier high schools in the city. In this district, students were able to apply to any “selective enrollment” school; that is, the schools were open to any student, city-wide, provided they met the academic requirements. He chose to attend Riverside over the other, highly regarded school based on the experience of his brother, three years his
senior. Sullivan described his academic identity and his experiences in grammar school as being overall positive:

Ansari: What was your experience like with your teachers in grammar school?
Sullivan: It was basically the same with all of them. Basically the same in high school too. Basically saying that, “You have very good potential,” but I didn’t show it a lot because I am a very goofy person, act goofy a lot. So my relationship with them, I don’t necessarily disrespect them, per se, but I disrespect them by, you know, acting goofy in class. But, you know, they all like me. I am just a lovable guy.

Ansari: What are your teachers’ expectations for you?
Sullivan: Everybody tells me—my parents, everybody—tells me I am a very smart person, I just don’t show it a lot through what I do. So I just act out, act a fool sometimes. But I just need to learn to live up to my potential, just do the things that I know I am capable of doing and just getting to a higher level, I guess.

Ansari: How do you think you did in Mr. Thompkins’s class?
Sullivan: Basically slacked off. You know, they say seniors check out early because it is senior year. I wrote in one of my reflections, “I never checked in.” Because basically I have been doing the same thing I have been doing since I was little. (personal communication, April 7, 2011)

In Sullivan’s case, the institutional assumptions about Black student identity simply did not apply. Sullivan viewed himself as a competent and intelligent student who would eventually get around to doing the work and being a “good student,” because he saw himself as someone who was completely capable of doing so. His family was also very involved in his academic life and fully encouraged and supported his intent to go to college.
This is important given that Sullivan identified himself as a learner who had been “doing the same thing I have been doing since I was little.”

As I noted in Chapter 4, Edward Saint-John described the socialization practices at Riverside as the process by which freshman enter the school and, as they matriculate, become “these terrific humans” by the end of their senior year. Contrary to that model, Sullivan did not perceive much change in his own academic behavior in his time at Riverside, a self-conception that was supported by what his English teacher, Thompkins, said about him. How did Sullivan narrate aspects of his academic identity? Sullivan expressed experiences indicating the cumulative effect of a lifetime of positive reinforcement from his teachers and educational experiences that allowed him to exert minimal effort and still maintain good academic standing:

Ansari: What kind of student are you?
Sullivan: I am an exceptional student, who could be an exceeding student.
Ansari: What makes you exceptional?
Sullivan: My smarts, how smart I am to get by. Smart enough to get by, I do the things that make me smart enough to get by.
Ansari: Do you find yourself bored in school?
Sullivan: Some classes I find myself bored. (personal communication, April, 7, 2011)

Sullivan’s experiences spoke to both his academic identity and socialization experiences in his career as a student. Sullivan showed confidence in his intellectual ability which was supported both by the feedback he received from teachers and the ease with which he was able to execute the academic work. His lack of motivation and “boredom” were a response to the academic socialization practices that Sullivan encountered at Riverside. This lack of
engagement, while prominent, was not necessarily addressed by department policies for academic differentiation or accountability structures. At the institutional level, SBI structure called forth the approach of “responsiveness” to student behavior that translated to positive reinforcement. Additionally, according to Sullivan, his teachers addressed his procrastination by calling upon his innate academic abilities and strengths. Sullivan spoke of how his lack of engagement in school was characterized:

Ansari: How do you think your teachers see you as a student?

Sullivan: Well, they always say, "We see the great in you. One day you will be able to live up to that potential that you know that you can live up to." (personal communication, April 7, 2011)

While these excerpts are merely snapshots of Sullivan’s narrative identity, they do serve to highlight some key inconsistencies in how his particular needs were addressed by teachers and administrators, given that he was a resilient learner with a strong academic identity but one who showed inconsistent responsibility and academic engagement. The deficit ideologies and missionary orientation at the institutional level served to address only students with fragile academic identities and provided supports for academic engagement primarily through socio-emotional socialization. However, these particular socialization mechanisms, as my analysis in the following section shows, exacerbated habits and behaviors that led to inconsistent academic engagement.
7.1.2 Gaming the System: The Growth Model as a Constraint on Academic Success

Four weeks before the quarter ended, on a sunny April afternoon, Thompkins’s class was working on their notecards and summaries. This was a step in their research process in which students found articles in their area of interest and wrote out summaries of each source they would potentially use in their final paper on a notecard. Five minutes after the bell rang and class had begun, Sullivan took off his headphones and logged on to the computer to do his research. The class was moving toward drafting their final papers for the Senior Project, but Sullivan had been dragging his feet. He had not turned in the most recent installment of his notecards, nor had he finished his accompanying summaries. In fact, for a couple of weeks before that day, he was intermittently absent, showed varied engagement in class discussion and participation, and failed to complete homework. After this period of inconsistent effort, Thompkins told him in an after-class conference, “James, if you don’t turn in your notecards, you are going to fail this quarter, you will not be able to complete the Senior Project, and you are in danger of not graduating” (field notes, April 7, 2011). Sullivan listened to Thompkins as he lectured him about responsibility and just nodded his head. Something in what Thompkins said to Sullivan that day seemed to “stick.” He had pushed the deadline to the point where he had no choice but to work furiously and play catch-up for the remainder of the year. On this particular day (April 14, 2011), Sullivan decided that engaging was probably in his best interest. He had decided to finally “plug in” (field notes, April 14, 2011). For the rest of the period, he worked, read, researched, and stayed on task. The looming deadline, which was less than a month away, with almost 25% of his work still incomplete, had given Sullivan a newfound motivation to plow through the work and finish his notecards. For most of the period, Thompkins walked around the room
to the various tables and gave students feedback on their notecards. He spent about five minutes with each student, all of whom were at varying stages in the writing process. Some had completed a fairly thorough rough draft from their outlines, others had completed their introduction and were working on their body paragraphs, and others still were struggling with how to synthesize the last pieces of research they have gathered. Sullivan was still at the research-gathering stage. Thompkins spoke to Sullivan as he walked by to work with another student:

Tompkins: James, it’s really hard for me to help you and guide you if you don’t have anything for me to look at. We are getting to the last stages of this project. Time is of the essence.

Sullivan: Yes, Mr. Thompkins, I’m on it. (field notes, April 14, 2011)

Both Thompkins and Sullivan were familiar with this frequent interaction, which comprised a negotiation of practices and tasks. Throughout the course of the year, Sullivan had shifted from willing, engaged class participant to passive and disengaged. In his moments of disengagement, he didn’t act out, show impatience, or display disrespect; he simply chose not to “do.” On some occasions, when he was bored and got out of his seat, he would quietly say something to another student on his way to sharpen his pencil, which in many cases drew a smirk or a quiet laugh (field notes, November 3, 2010; January 14, 2011). Six weeks into the first semester, when I asked Sullivan why he had not done his homework and was not participating in class, he replied, “I just didn’t feel like it, I know I have some time to make it up” (field notes, February 4, 2011).

Sullivan reminded me of some of my own students, the ones who were personable and easy-going, but in some ways, the hardest to teach. These are the boys who are smart and
thoughtful, if and when they feel like it. Sullivan described his attitude and his academic sensibility as a “consistency of inconsistency” (personal communication, April 7, 2011).

According to Sullivan, his teachers were willing to help and outspoken about giving him a lot of positive reinforcement, i.e., he had been told “all his life” that he was capable and intelligent (personal communication, April 7, 2011). While this is could be an important starting point, it is not the type of support that he needed or the type of support that would result in opportunities for him to be challenged academically. As he stated in his interview, Sullivan found himself bored on many occasions. Thompkins discussed his own concerns about Sullivan’s future success in college based on his observation of Sullivan’s work not only in his current year, but also throughout his academic career at Riverside. As he pondered Sullivan’s identity as a student, his overall assessment was that he “came in as a really bright freshman, but was leaving as a smart senior” (personal communication, May 31, 2011). I point out the teacher perspective because it reveals discrepancies in how Sullivan and Thompkins each viewed Sullivan’s academic identity. Both student and teacher agreed that Sullivan could be more proactive about his work completion and maturity. However, while Sullivan felt like he would do well in college if he just “step[ped] up his game” (personal communication, May 31, 2011) (through work completion), Thompkins had reservations about Sullivan’s academic trajectory after high school:

Ansari: Why do you think James will be leaving Riverside only as a “smart senior”?

Tompkins: He just didn’t do the work, and he could’ve been much smarter and much better had he applied himself and taken a lot of stuff seriously. So, that’s where he is with that, he is pretty honest with himself. It’s just so frustrating to me and his family, because it’s like, “Well, you’re complaining about the same stuff you’ve been
complaining about for years. You’re procrastinating. We get it.” James won’t make it in college either if he doesn’t mature. Now James doesn’t care about appearance. Everybody knows James is smart. I think with James—he is so smart, really. In all of his classes, he could do well. It’s just that he has to do a lot of reading and writing in my class, and you can’t fake that. He’s in a two-parent home and his dad is very supportive, and so he won’t make it in college if he doesn’t do his work as well. (personal communication, May 31, 2011)

It is important to note that, in Thompkins’s words, Sullivan was “honest with himself,” something that the growth model cultivates—supporting metacognitive and reflective behavior. Teacher-student conferences at Riverside included the students’ reflecting on their academic progress and identifying their own academic goals. However, my analysis of the classroom and student interview data indicates that in the case of Sullivan, these policies did not necessarily provide opportunities to be academically challenged. In Thompkins view, the academic expectations of the teacher at the classroom level were at odds with the socialization practices at the institutional level. In the area of academic responsibility, this tension came to the forefront. Because the broader academic and socio-emotional socialization practices left room for “flexibility” academic expectations were lowered, and gave rise to negotiation practices. This practice of negotiation was seen by students as a result of the growth model.

The testimony of both Sullivan and his teacher reflected that Sullivan was actually proud of his intelligence. He saw his intelligence as an asset, both then and in his future life as a college student. Sullivan was not afraid to sound “smart” in class, as evidenced through his willingness to participate in discussion (field notes, November 3, 2010; December 10,
2010; January 14, 2011; April 7, 2011). In fact, he was often viewed by his classmates as the competent student, a characterization that he rarely shied away from: “I would consider myself a really good student, and I have always been a smart student, I just don’t apply myself a lot of the time” (personal communication, January 25, 2011).

Because the academic socialization processes at Riverside were designed to address the needs of Black (male) students as constructed in the institutional ideology and discourse, Sullivan’s academic needs were overlooked. In short, there were no intentional processes or structures to address an academically resilient student who had a father in his life. Sullivan’s academic shortcomings, which stemmed from boredom as well as procrastination (his inability to structure and manage his time), were not intentionally or strategically addressed.

Riverside’s over-reliance on the growth model is part of the reason for the mismatch between institutional practices and the fulfillment of the academic needs of many students. As I discussed in Chapter 5, some teachers did not fully buy in to the way in which the college-readiness mission was instantiated at Riverside. Thompkins, while he appropriated and supported the mission, held some reservations about and displayed ambivalence toward the growth model. As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, the growth model was a specific avenue for addressing perceived deficits in students in the interest of promoting academic engagement and growth. Thompkins reflected on the growth model and its effectiveness in the case of Sullivan:

Ansari: Do you think with a boy like [James Sullivan], the growth model works?

Thompkins: Yes and no. I think because he gets in intellectually, he understands. So it’s almost better for him because he can’t just do enough to get by the whole year; he has
to show that he’s trying harder and learning. But it’s also that he can outsmart the system. So he cannot do well, then try and do well at the end. So in the end, it depends on the teacher, right? So I can call him on his BS, which I’m pretty good with him about doing, but that doesn’t mean I can’t get fooled sometimes. I would say yes. (personal communication, May 31, 2011)

While Thompkins posited that for the most part, the growth model was effective, he was also aware that this model was contingent on teacher’s abilities to navigate and use this new system of grading. However, it is also important to note that Thompkins, in other instances had reservations about the growth model (as elucidated in Chapter 5) and the “institutional pressure” to use this model that influenced how many failing grades he was allowed to give. The growth model, because it operated on an assumption that student academic identity was fragile, did not explicitly address identities that fell outside the institutional construction of identity. Thompkins’s concern—that Sullivan could intentionally slack off and then show growth through a last-minute effort—was entirely realizable. It would take a teacher with a non-deficit approach to students to ensure that students had other academic identities available to them beyond those that the institution’s leaders constructed, both ideologically and discursively. The testimonies of both Sullivan and his teacher represented Sullivan’s academic identity as resilient. Sullivan was not struggling with his academic identity (relative to resilience and academic fragility), but with academic responsibility. Furthermore, classroom activities were not differentiated enough to encompass the varying needs of students. My field notes below describe instances in which Sullivan did not need the allotted time for a particular task or activity:
(10:01 A.M.) Students are reading a play aloud (Shakespeare) and four students are reading to the class. (10:12 A.M.) Jason [Thompkins] poses the question: “What is the main character’s argument in this scene?” and he leads the discussion. (10:16 A.M.) Jason [Thompkins] asks students to read through the next scene by themselves and identify evidence of character’s motivation. (10:25 A.M.) [James Sullivan] is done early; he closes his book and turns on his iPod. (November 3, 2010)

(3:15 P.M.) Thompkins: “All right, you have ten minutes left finish up your [critical reflection journals]. I feel like we got some work done today. You have to find quotes from the graphic novel.” Students are working in pairs, [but Sullivan and three other students] are working individually. Sullivan gets done early and he goes to the computer and checks his email. (December 10, 2010)

(2:23 P.M.) [Thompkins] tells the class they have few minutes to review before they take the quiz. (2:27 P.M.) [Thompkins] hands out quiz. (2:39 P.M.) Students are still working and the class is pretty quiet. [Sullivan] is done early. He goes to the back of the classroom and picks up a book from shelf—he reads. (March 31, 2011)

These instances of lack of engagement with academic tasks indicate a broader issue of classroom activities and classroom-based socialization not fitting Sullivan’s needs.

According to Thompkins, Sullivan would often turn in classroom assignments that were hurriedly completed. In Thompkins’s assessment, however, his work was usually “done well” (personal communication, May 31, 2011). As such, these instances indicate that the academic socialization practices did not provide Sullivan with enough academically challenging tasks. Furthermore, student expectations were not explicitly enforced with the implementation of the growth model. By student expectations, in this case, I am referring to
adherence to deadlines. Thompkins’s concern that a student could “game” the system—not exerting any effort and then attempting to compensate at the last minute by handing in late work to avoid a failing grade—was a scenario that I observed with Sullivan on many occasions. As such, the use of the growth model may have been more effective if ideological constructions of academic identity at the institutional level were more asset-oriented.

The academic experiences of James Sullivan, based on my analysis, did not provide him with enough opportunities to challenge his thinking or to cultivate college-ready behaviors of independence, perseverance, and responsibility. Sullivan displayed strong academic resilience and confidence in his abilities, and the academic socialization practices instituted by the department, i.e., the growth model, were intended to cultivate resilience. But Sullivan, who displayed resilience and academic confidence, was therefore denied opportunities to challenge his thinking or to cultivate perseverance.

### 7.2 Leroy Blackwell: Conflating Academic Growth With Socio-Emotional Socialization

As a participant observer in the classroom, I wanted to make my students comfortable while I was learning about who they were as students and as people. In my initial stage of research and data collection, I tried to be as non-descript as I could while toting around my notepad and video camera. I smiled and invited conversation, but I did not ask any questions beyond “How are you?” or “How was your day?” The students revealed themselves slowly as they built trust in and comfort around me. This was not the case with Leroy Blackwell.

On my first day in the classroom, before the bell rang and as students were getting situated, Blackwell walked right up to me and introduced himself, and he asked me how I
was doing. Strangely enough, he did not ask me about my camera. In his nicely pressed uniform, tie, and dark-rimmed glasses, my first impression of him was that he was polite, polished, and very confident.

My analysis of Blackwell’s interview, in which he spoke of his own academic identity, revealed a strong example of academic resilience. His reflections on his admissions process to Riverside indicated that he had consistent and engaged parental support. However, in the area of academic responsibility, he showed inconsistent effort. This resistance to the academic domain of socialization, which registered at the classroom level, was in some ways overlooked and de-emphasized through institutional practices, namely through heavy emphasis on socio-emotional support. The imbalance between classroom expectations and institutional expectations surfaced through two relevant experiences in Blackwell’s life at the time, namely that (1) he had recently come out as a homosexual, and (2) he was failing his English class. Blackwell was struggling with his sexual identity, and he sought out school supports, such as his counselor, to help him cope and manage. These supports in some instances caused friction between Blackwell and his teacher, Jason Thompkins, because Blackwell used class time to visit his counselor. His frequent tardiness was excused by the administration. Furthermore, when he was failing his English class, he attempted to negotiate his failing grade by seeking out support from the English department chair, Ted O’Brien, and Blackwell’s previous English teacher, Jane Park—citing personality differences between himself and Thompkins, as the reason for his failing grade.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the three identity characteristics that characterized the institutional construction of identity at Riverside, namely lack of resilience, lack of responsibility, and lack of school knowledge and behaviors. I begin my analysis of Leroy
Blackwell with a discussion of his academic resilience, and then I provide context to some of his school behaviors relative to school-wide policies and initiatives (SBI, socio-emotional support), which constructed him as a “good student.” I then provide my analysis of how these school-wide policies and dominant discourses illuminated imbalance between these broader initiatives and a teacher's classroom expectations. This tension was brought about by the way in which academic identities were addressed at different levels (institution, classroom). Lastly, I discuss how broader ideologies and practices allowed Blackwell to negotiate both classroom expectations and his grades.

7.2.1 “A Lot of It Was My Articulation”: Leroy Blackwell’s Academic Resilience

Blackwell transferred to Riverside at the beginning of his junior year from a neighborhood school. His decision to attend Riverside was a collective one, arrived at through conversations with his mother, his teachers, and his counselor at the high school he was attending at the time. His ultimate goal was to go to college and to succeed:

Ansari: Why did you decide to attend Riverside?
Blackwell: Solely for academic reasons. Solely for a better academic performance, because I would have a better chance of matriculating in college if I was better prepared than the school I was at.

Ansari: Why did you want to transfer out of your neighborhood school?
Blackwell: Well, my counselor told me, “You don’t belong here. You should be at a selective enrollment school.” And many of my teachers said, “You don’t look like type of student we usually have here.” And I just started laughing, and I was like, “I’ve heard it before.” I don’t know; it was like my mom and I had almost given up hope, and so we
started looking after schools. Unfortunately, many of the schools we looked at— their application process was closed. And there was Riverside. I ended up speaking to my now-mentor and chief operating officer of the school [Ken Grayson], and we got an interview set up. (personal communication, February 4, 2011)

Unlike many of his peers, Blackwell was a transfer student and could speak to the various considerations that helped him arrive at his decision. First, he wanted to be in a place that would prepare him for college and that would provide a rigorous learning environment. He found the academic work to be “too easy” at the high school he was attending previously. Like many of his peers in Thompkins’s class, he chose Riverside because of its explicit college-ready mission, and he appropriated the institutional discourse of college-readiness, choosing to attend as a way of improving his educational outcomes.

In the case of Blackwell, there was a connection between academic resilience and taking the initiative to attend Riverside. His responses in the interview indicated that he was academically confident and resilient before he matriculated at Riverside. He was also well informed about the college admissions process, and his desire to move out of his neighborhood school was tied to how he and his previous teachers had constructed his academic identity. He also showed a strong sense of initiative by transferring in the middle of his high school academic career. He chose Riverside because he missed the transfer dates of other schools, and besides, many of those other schools did not accept non-freshman. Riverside was willing to accept Blackwell, and when he visited, he liked the environment of Riverside, which he said “was really different from what I had been used to” (personal communication, February 4, 2011).
Blackwell showed a strong sense of resilience and initiative both in how he spoke of his future plans and ambitions—he wanted to attain at least a graduate degree—and how he presented himself in the school and the classroom. According to Blackwell, his counselor at his previous school said that Blackwell “didn’t look like the type” (personal communication, February 4, 2011) who would attend that school, a sentiment that Blackwell said was echoed by many others. When I asked him to elaborate on what he thought they meant, how he was different from others in the school, he stated, “I guess, a lot of it was my articulation. A lot of it was my ability to succeed in class amongst my peers” (personal communication, February 4, 2011). According to Blackwell, his teachers at his previous school also echoed the sentiments of his counselor, encouraging him to seek other educational opportunities for himself. Most importantly, Blackwell perceived himself as different from his previous peers, and his teachers had constructed him as a “good student.” This instance of discursive formation (as an articulate student) is significant in that it is also tied to underlying assumptions about what it means to be a Black male student—an explicit call out to his articulation was perceived by his teachers as something unique and different from his peers. Scholars have examined the ways in which language use is tied to white cultural linguistic hegemony, (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Delpit, 1998; Smitherman, 1972; Smitherman & Baugh, 2002). Alim & Smitherman (2012) closely examined how the use of the word “articulate” to describe Blacks in public life is tied to deep-seated assumptions about an individual’s facility with the language.

Blackwell represents an opposition to the institutional construction of identity in terms of resilience. His academic competency, confidence in his ability to succeed, and resilience were evident in his attitude toward learning, in observations that his teachers and
counselor at his previous school made about him (as suggested through his interview), and in his decision to attend Riverside. He showed initiative and motivation in seeking out better opportunities for his educational growth. Furthermore, the case of Blackwell also disrupts the underlying attitudes and assumptions that the college-readiness process needed to be “demystified” for parents. Blackwell’s mother was instrumental in helping him through the transfer process, and she supported him in his efforts to carve out a life path that promised greater educational opportunities and that prioritized college-readiness.

7.3 Academic Responsibility:

**Performative Stances as a Salient Indicator of Student Success**

Blackwell was definitely not shy. He was an active participant in the classroom and would ask questions when he was confused about something or needed further clarification. He participated often in discussions, and he offered feedback to other students during the whole-class reflections—sometimes to the chagrin of his classmates. In some cases, I would hear students sigh and roll their eyes because Blackwell had yet another question. “Leroy, we didn’t get your two cents,” one student called out to him when he had been particularly quiet during one of the lessons (field notes, March 31, 2011). For all intents and purposes, Blackwell took advantage of the opportunities for learning. In terms of performance, he was a “good student” because he was vocal and collaborative, he asked questions, and he took advantages of opportunities in the moment (participation in discussion, small group collaboration, and questioning).
However, Blackwell's consistent participation and outspokenness were not reinforced by actual time on task, in-class work completion, or homework completion, i.e., while he met the behavioral expectations in the classroom through discussion and participation, with Blackwell there was a lot of negotiation over academic responsibility. Additionally, he was aware of the institutional behavioral expectations, e.g., performative stances that reflected what it means to “do” school. Through the Daily Harmony initiative and SBI, he was rewarded for those performative behaviors that allowed him to claim a dress-down (non-uniform) day or a pizza party. He was given excellence referrals by several of his teachers for always being in uniform, and I argue, for the degree of ease with which he communicated both with his peers and with the adults in the building. In this arena, he made the grade.

7.3.1 Negotiating Classroom Expectations

According to Thompkins, when Blackwell came out to his class about his sexual identity, his peers were “very supportive,” and they had the attitude of, “Well yeah, we kinda knew already.” (personal communication, May 31, 2011). As Blackwell was grappling with this, he was allowed to spend a lot of time in the counselor’s office without being penalized for arriving late to Thompkins’s class.

After the bell rang on January 25, 2011, Thompkins began his lesson on Shakespeare. As students went to their seats, they began writing a response to the question that Thompkins had posed on the board: “How does the metaphor of blindness reflect King’s Lear’s character in the last Act?” Students wrote quietly for five minutes, and as they finished their first task, Thompkins facilitated a short discussion of students’ responses. In his discussion,
he prompted students to reflect back on their assumptions by citing specific evidence from the text. By the time he concluded the discussion, twenty minutes had passed since the bell had rung. At that time, Blackwell walked in to class without a pass and went to his seat. When Thompkins asked him if he had a pass, he said that he had been in the counselor’s office and that he didn’t have a pass. The exchange below from my fieldnotes illustrates the tension between classroom expectations and school-wide expectations and supports:

Thompkins: Leroy, you missed almost thirty minutes of class.

Blackwell: I was at the counselor’s office.

Thompkins: This is not something you can make up.

Blackwell: Sorry, Mr. Thompkins. (field notes, January 25, 2011)

Blackwell joined the rest of the class in participating in the class activities for the rest of the period. In many more instances, he arrived late to class without a pass after visiting his counselor and without an apology for being late. Blackwell’s punctuality became more inconsistent by the middle of the year. This invariably affected the amount of time he had to complete assignments or to follow along on the key concepts, ideas, and content covered in his absence. Blackwell’s engagement in the class was varied throughout the year. By the end of the year, when deadlines were looming, his attendance became much more consistent as he didn’t want to fail his class. In his interview, Blackwell reflected on his academic engagement in English class and admitted that he did not always show consistent effort:

Ansari: Do you think you take your studies seriously?
Blackwell: I think I do. I think I can. I know I have gotten off track a little bit, especially in Mr. Thompkins's class, but I know I am off track and I know when I am serious. (personal communication, May 5, 2011)

This negotiation of punctuality and Blackwell's consistent avoidance of class by visiting the counselor's office were, in some ways, institutionally sanctioned. Blackwell was not penalized for missing class or for not turning in missed tasks. He was dealing with personal, emotional issues at home due to his coming out as a homosexual, and he drew upon the resources of the school to deal with that. Because the academic socialization practices at Riverside constituted an over-emphasis of socio-emotional support as an important pathway to learning, Blackwell acted upon this institutional priority by negotiating classroom expectations, such as coming to class on time. This invariably affected his ability to “catch up” on the material that was covered in class as well as to complete the required tasks both in and out of the classroom. These instances of negotiation represent the priority of the affective domain over academic domain at Riverside.

7.3.2 Negotiating Grades

As I mentioned in the previous sections, Blackwell's strong academic identity (through performative stances) was substantiated and supported through SBI and Daily Harmony. His negotiation of classroom expectations was bolstered by the emphasis on socio-emotional support. In fact, Blackwell spoke about the close familial relationships cultivated between the staff and students at Riverside. I argue that these experiences informed how Blackwell understood academic growth and success and provided a ripe context for
understanding how and why he attempted to negotiate his grade in AP English. I argue that Blackwell conceptualized relationships as “mediating” his academic success and failure, namely because he perceived his failing English grade as a result of personal tension between himself and his English teacher, Thompkins, rather than as a result of his own effort or work output. His academic identity, as co-constructed at the institutional level through the rewards and acknowledgement he received (through SBI, Daily Harmony, and relationships with staff), was of a highly responsible student. His academic identity, as co-constructed at the classroom level by his teacher, was of an irresponsible student. As suggested in Chapter 5, Thompkins’s prescribed ideologies and discourses concerning student identity did not always align with the professed ideologies and dominant discourses at the school. This discrepancy opened a space for negotiating grades, behavior, and expectations.

His reliance on emotional support and the relationships he built with staff surfaced in Blackwell’s interview. In fact, he mentioned that Ken Grayson, the co-founder of the school, was his mentor. Additionally, Thompkins, in his assessment of Blackwell, characterized him as someone who is “very comfortable with adults” (personal communication, May 31, 2011). In his interview, Blackwell identified the sense of community and the close-knit relationships he had with staff as something he finds particularly valuable:

Ansari: What do you like most about your experience as a student at Riverside?

Blackwell: There’s a great sense of not only community, but also a deeper sense of family. Like, I know one time we went to the other campus and me and my counselor were walking up the stairs, and I told her that it smelled like love. If you go in the office
or any of the counselor’s offices, there’s love. And they care about the students.

(personal communication, May 31, 2011)

As Blackwell was grappling with the complexities of his identity, his work was falling short. He was being rewarded by the institution for these performative behaviors, but at the same time he was struggling academically in his English class. His identity as a good student was being contested at the classroom level, and he had difficulty accepting that criticism. Given that he found positive relationships with adults to be a particularly salient aspect of his experience at Riverside, and given the degree to which institutional norms supported those relationships, I argue that Blackwell used that institutional priority to his advantage. Due in some part to his absences in class as well as his frequent tardiness, Blackwell would often turn in work late or not complete tasks he had missed. In several instances, Blackwell was late to class during writing workshop days, during which Thompkins worked intensively with students on drafting, conferring, and revising summative essay assignments. As such, Blackwell’s writing grade suffered. As a response, he would oftentimes visit Jane Park or Ted O’Brien to express concern about his relationship with Thompkins and the tension he was experiencing with him as Blackwell attempted to improve his grade. Blackwell understood academic success and failure as contingent on the nature of teacher-student relationships instead of on effort. Blackwell saw academic identity as tied to his relationship with his teacher, and I would argue, he used that to make sense of the dissonance between how he was constructed at the institutional level and how he was constructed at the classroom level. Given that he “performed” all the behaviors that were associated with being a good student, he believed that he was solidly on the pathway toward college.
The heart of the issue, according to Thompkins, was that Blackwell was not completing his work. Thompkins discussed Blackwell’s behavior and how his inconsistent work habits were becoming increasingly problematic:

Leroy was a real challenge for me this year because—and this is actually directly related to Jane [Park] and Ted [O'Brien]—he is very smart and charming and polished and all that stuff, but he doesn’t do his work. He does good work when he does it, but he doesn’t hand in work on time. And I was being really firm with him, and he would, at the beginning of the year, go to other people to complain, especially Jane, because he was one of her students. And Jane tried to deflect the conversations. She was talking about the male/female stuff, like, “I nurture you. He’s being firm with you.” And I think that was how she framed the conversation with him, and he wasn’t having it. So then he went to Ted, [who] is his advisory teacher, but who was [also the department] chair, and I think he was trying to complain...But we wouldn’t have had those problems if he had been doing his work. (personal communication, May 31, 2011)

In Chapter 5, I discussed how the missionary and deficit ideologies served to promote emotional resilience, and specifically how Ted O'Brien, the department chair, and Jane Park, Leroy’s former teacher, characterized academic behaviors and work completion. Specifically, lack of work completion was in many cases a result of lack of father figures at home who would provide accountability, something O’Brien perceived as a masculine trait. Furthermore, O’Brien asserted academic and emotional resilience as an important pathway to academic success, was a departmental priority. As such, Blackwell felt comfortable going to O'Brien with his personal issues with Thompkins. Park framed the discussion with him around the notion of relationships and male/female identities: Thompkins was showing
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him a more paternal, “tough love” attitude, whereas she had been more maternal and nurturing. Park reinforced the idea that school practices were tied to emotional socialization and that teachers served as a proxy for family members. In that particular discussion, this discursive frame ideologically constructed Blackwell within a deficit model and as a student who needed paternal, family-like relationships at school. Most importantly, Park’s discussion about Blackwell’s grades focused on teachers’ responses to him, and she did not directly address his actions in class or what he could do to improve his grade.

According to Thompkins, Blackwell’s “issues” with him as a teacher stemmed from his inconsistent work and his failing grades. But Blackwell framed his academic failure as a consequence of his “negative” relationship with Thompkins. I argue that this conceptualization was informed by the socialization processes that Blackwell experienced. Thompkins raised concerns about Blackwell’s lack of consistency:

He had some emotional stuff, and he came out as being gay, so I think there was a lot of stuff around that, and he was just hoping to get some privileges. And I think he wanted to be treated special, and I wasn’t doing that. I wanted him to do his work and prove himself. You can’t just charm me, you have to do your work and you have to do a good job. He was finding that a little more difficult than he thought it would be, ‘cause he is used to charming people. And he is charming. He is intelligent and very comfortable with adults. (personal communication, May 31, 2011).

Given the academic socialization practices at Riverside that privileged emotional support, Blackwell took advantage of these sensibilities with his other teachers and his counselor so that he would not be held accountable for his work in class. This negotiation, according to
Thompkins, was problematic because Blackwell may not have developed the discipline or work habits to succeed in college:

Ansari: What do you think about Leroy’s ability to succeed in college?

Thompkins: Academically, his ability— I have no doubt that he will succeed in college. If he doesn’t apply himself and he tries that stuff [he did with me], he won’t make it through his first year. You know, never being on time with his assignments. In college, it’s different. He’ll walk in my class five to ten minutes late; he’ll make appointments with the counselors to try and avoid his AP classes. He just wants to sort of do what he wants to do, and he came in one time half an hour late with a sandwich, without a pass. If he does those things, he won’t make it. And like any individual he can’t charm and go around and complain [to other teachers]. So I don’t know; I mean, I root for him, and I want him to do well, but if those behaviors don’t change, he won’t graduate from the first college he goes to. (personal communication, May 31, 2011)

Thompkins’s concerns about Blackwell’s inconsistent work habits and how they may translate into future college success indicate problematic tensions in the story of college-readiness at Riverside. Thompkins’s explanation of why Blackwell would struggle in college suggested that academic responsibility is a significant factor in college success.

The case of Leroy Blackwell points to the misalignment between his academic needs and identity and how those were addressed through the socialization practices at various levels at Riverside. In my analysis, I highlighted how emotional support was foregrounded for Blackwell and how behavioral stances were privileged over academic development. These practices were propelled by assumptions about student resilience and knowledge of school-appropriate behaviors. However, as my analysis indicated, Blackwell was
academically resilient and showed strong knowledge of school-appropriate behaviors. Nevertheless, these identities were supported and cultivated at the expense of cultivating other college-ready behaviors. In my analysis, I also deconstructed how the focus on socio-emotional support and behavioral stances allowed Blackwell to negotiate behaviors and grades in the classroom.

### 7.4 Summary

In the two case studies above, I illustrated how Sullivan’s and Blackwell’s identities resisted the broad *institutional construction of identity* with respect to resilience and school knowledge and college-ready behaviors. Both students’ responses indicate that they had academic confidence and were resilient (resilience as defined by teachers and staff). Both students also indicated that they were intentional about choosing Riverside because they wanted to attend a college-prep institution, and their families were instrumental in helping them navigate that choice. As such, the identities that were discursively constructed for students at Riverside fall flat in light of the experiences of these two students. The two case studies also uncover some problematic tensions that arise from socialization practices that over-emphasize socio-emotional socialization. In the case of Sullivan, the growth model allowed him to utilize the system to his advantage and hand in late work. Furthermore, given that he was perceived as academically talented by his teacher who came in as a “bright freshman” but was leaving as a “smart senior” raises some questions about how academically challenged he was. In the case of Blackwell, the focus on socio-emotional socialization allowed him to negotiate classroom expectations and negotiate his failing grade. As Brad Dunlay suggested in Chapter 5, lack of accountability and structure allowed
students to negotiate with their teachers in various arenas of academics and behavior. This was exemplified in the case of Blackwell. It is also important to consider that James Sullivan and Leroy Blackwell enacted their agency as students through the academic “responsibility” characteristic. Because student identity at Riverside was constructed by administrators and some teachers writ large as “un-resilient” and “academically fragile,” the socialization practices that arose from this discursive construction failed to address these particular learners who were resilient and academically confident, such as Sullivan and Blackwell. While the institutional socialization practices differentially impact these two students, I argue it was the lack of addressing student agency, accountability, and responsibility that constrained opportunities for further academic growth.
CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

“Changes are products of intensive efforts.”

- Muhammad Yunus

In the preceding four chapters, I provided an in-depth analysis of the institutional ideologies and discourses that informed college-readiness practices and academic socialization at Riverside College Prep. In this chapter, I summarize the key findings with respect to ideologies and discourses that create systems of meaning about educating Black students. Furthermore, I outline key practices that emerged from these ideologies and discourses—practices, including academic socialization, socio-emotional socialization, and both school-wide and departmental policies that created roadblocks to and tensions over college-readiness. Taken together, these ideologies, discourses, and practices operated to discursively construct Riverside students in what I refer to as their institutional construction of identity. I then review key findings with respect to how students situate themselves in relation to the institutional construction of identity. Referring back to James Sullivan and Leroy Blackwell, the two students discussed in Chapter 7, I highlight specific tensions and roadblocks to academic success and college-readiness. I then offer potential topics for future research that emerge from my key findings, with respect to ideologies, discourses, socialization practices in schools, and college-readiness in general. Lastly, I offer some limitations of this dissertation.
8.1 Key Findings

In response to the prompt *What are the most salient institutional discourses and ideologies of “college-readiness,” and how do they inform meanings, goals, and socialization practices at Riverside College Prep?*, my analysis revealed that there were two prevalent ideologies—deficit and missionary—that mediated discourses about student learning, the institutional construction of identities, and professional practice. These systems of meaning informed a broad set of academic socialization practices that privileged socio-emotional socialization over academic socialization, a decision that was evident at the departmental, classroom, and student levels.

The missionary ideology at Riverside can be locally conceived as an orientation toward students in which teachers and staff functioned to save Black students from their communities and from themselves. This orientation was reflected in prominent discourses that identified schools as spaces of revitalization and student transformation, teachers as the primary agents of change, and the profession of teaching as a spiritual and emotional act. This savior mentality was reflected in language concerning what Riverside students needed, namely “love” and strong family-like relationships with staff and teachers, as spoken by the Riverside co-founder and chief operating officer, Ken Grayson: “I think it’s magnified at Riverside, that students need to have relationships with adults who they know care about them” (personal communication, September 17, 2010). Furthermore, the role of the teacher, as spoken by English teacher Jane Park, was to help students “find the goodness in themselves” (personal communication, November 3, 2010). These beliefs about what students needed was informed by deep-seated assumptions about Black students and their perceived emotional fragility, their home lives, and the communities
they came from. The deficit ideology was reflected in discourse that emphasized the cultural deficits of students, poverty as a roadblock to learning, and a lack of student resilience and motivation. Students at Riverside were characterized by some teachers and senior leadership as needing a different sort of education than their white or middle class peers because, as English department chair Ted O’Brien stated, “I think [academic failure] is one byproduct of poverty. One of the messages that poverty seems to send even the most unsuspecting young person is that you do not have self-efficacy” (personal communication, October 29, 2010). This conceptualization was also reflected in staff language about the effects of poverty on student engagement and resilience. In more general terms, the language used by some teachers and administrators to describe students reflected significant and deleterious assumptions about Black students and their identities. This generalized, deficit-oriented language included “broken,” “hot messes,” and “academically fragile.” Students’ home lives and experiences were also perceived by some teachers as “chaotic” and “having some real challenges.”

Given this broad set of assumptions about Riverside students, socio-emotional socialization was seen by Riverside staff as integral to preparing students for college, which represents an intersection of the missionary and deficit ideologies in terms of academic socialization and what it means to prepare Black students for college. This was a prominent theme in the discourse on “growth” in teacher and staff interviews: “Yeah, you have to love kids. You have to have that growth approach, that notion that kids are going to grow over

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2 I am not invoking my critique to claim that Black students need the same type of education as their white counterparts, nor to strip Black students of their identities, but rather to shed light on key differences in ideological orientation that some teachers and staff had toward Riverside students.
time” (Co-founder Edward Saint-John, personal communication, September 2, 2010). The idea of having a “growth approach” was tied to loving children, because Riverside students also “need to feel some success” (Principal Cynthia Banks, personal communication, September 24, 2010). As such, emphasizing growth as a pedagogical practice (as opposed to assessing students through a set of outcomes) was tied to assumptions about how Black students need to be taught, indicating that learning for Riverside students would only be successful if it was tied to socio-emotional socialization. Because students at Riverside were regarded as needing saving because of their supposedly chaotic home lives and deficits of intellect, emotion, and culture, these conceptualizations led to practices, policies, and initiatives at Riverside that focused on remediating student behavior, reframing students’ belief systems around learning, and acclimating students to the realities of college. This was reflected in school wide policies such as Rising Stars, a program whose explicit goal was to “prepare families for their children’s ultimate departure for college by providing multiple opportunities to practice the absence of their children from the family system;” SBI, a behavioral intervention that provided positive feedback in the form of excellence referrals; Daily Harmony, a school-wide violence prevention initiative with an external rewards systems; and Minority Mentorship Brotherhood, a program for male students at Riverside that emphasized violence prevention and the cultivation of strong intellectual identities. It is important to note that in much of the discourse surrounding the education of Black students at Riverside, race was not invoked explicitly; instead, the use of codified language was used to discuss the students. In effect, preparing students for college was ideologically grounded as repairing Black students.
The second guiding prompt *What are some tensions, affordances, and constraints that emerge from academic socialization practices at Riverside College Prep?*, allowed me to explore the types of practices that were supported and emphasized at Riverside given the ideological underpinnings and discourses concerning Black students and how they learn. As such, not only was socio-emotional socialization seen as an important precursor to college-readiness, it was in some cases privileged over academic socialization practices. One example of this was socio-emotional support from staff. Some teachers posited socio-emotional socialization as a necessary part of engaging their students in academics. In fact, some teachers conceived of their role in the classroom not just as teachers, but as individuals who served as proxies for family members. Jane Park said that co-department chair Ted O’Brien told her, “You need to find in yourself whatever male presence that you can bring to your students...that more masculine, fatherly, you know, hard working, discipline, accountability side for your students who need that and are not getting it at home” (personal communication, November 3, 2010).

There were some redeeming qualities of the socialization practices at Riverside, namely that the students felt they had positive relationships with their teachers. However, as noted in Chapters 5 and 7, tensions emerged for some teachers and students from these socialization practices because of the over-emphasis on *remediation* that was reflected in school-wide policies—such as SBI, Rising Stars, Daily Harmony, and Minority Mentorship Brotherhood—that did not address the intellectual sophistication of adolescents. These socialization practices imposed constraints on college-readiness in the form of practices of negotiation at the departmental and classroom levels (negotiation of expectations, negotiation of disciplinary practices). Given that socio-emotional socialization was seen by
school leaders and some teachers as the most important precursor to learning and academic success, I argue that it created a false trajectory of academic readiness and socialization for students at Riverside. More specifically, because cultivating resilience was overemphasized, both ideologically (as reflected in Riverside's mission statement) and through practices, creating resilient learners became the *outcome* and not the *mechanism* for preparing students for college. And given that socio-emotional growth was seen as an outcome, there was more focused attention paid to ensuring that students were not “academically fragile. Consequently, the affective domain was privileged over the academic domain, and academic growth was perceived as helping students to reframe their beliefs about their own intellectual capacities. Therefore, students did not have as much opportunity to engage in tasks that support mastery.

Given the prevailing institutional ideologies and discourses at Riverside, I attempted to gain an understanding of academic socialization practices with respect to discipline-specific instructional practices at the departmental level, guided by the prompt *What are some of the ways that teacher beliefs and institutional discourses inform socialization practices at Riverside?* Through my analysis, I found that, similar to remediation practices at the school-wide level, teacher beliefs about students’ academic fragility led to practices of negotiation of classroom practices. Two key examples of negotiation practices were seen through the growth model for instruction and the practice of “flexibility,” which was seen most prominently with flexibility of deadlines. Taken together, these two practices led to an overall negotiation of expectations with respect to behavior as well as academic outcomes. Flexibility with respect to expectations and deadlines was seen by Riverside administration and some staff as an important disposition for teaching Black students. This flexibility was
reflected in both direct interviews with me and teacher discussions in staff meetings. In fact, O’Brien and some teachers perceived “flexibility” as an important practice when teaching “these” students as opposed to their white and middle-class counterparts in the district’s better-resourced schools. Some teachers believed flexibility with accepting late work was important given that “there are no fathers, so that accountability piece is missing” (English teacher J. Park, personal communication, November 3, 2010). The growth model, a departmental initiative, was a grading system focused on student growth rather than a set of external academic outcomes. The implementation of the growth model as the departmental level was seen by some teachers as an avenue for lowering expectations and negotiating grades. English teacher Jackie Reynolds believed that the institution’s focus on socio-emotional growth created opportunities for students to take advantage of the system’s lack of accountability. She also noted that it created a different set of expectations for students at Riverside and would set them up for future failure in college. English teacher Jason Thompkins saw some limitations to the growth model as well, positing that it allowed students to game the system if it was not implemented properly. Furthermore, he stated that his failure rate was higher than Reynolds's due to “institutional pressure” (personal communication, May 31, 2011). But the school leaders perceived Reynolds as a teacher who didn’t believe that all students could learn. In fact, Saint-John characterized her disposition as someone who believed that Riverside was “being too kind...in these sort of funny ways.” Saint-John thus positioned Reynolds as someone who didn’t believe in “kindness” and, I argue, constructed Reynolds as an uncaring and uninvolved teacher.

To guide my examination of how students negotiated and appropriated identities, I used the prompt How do students respond to and make meaning of the various socializing
mechanisms in the classroom and at Riverside College Prep? I utilized a cross-case analysis to examine broad trends and to highlight areas of variation in students’ identities, specifically with respect to the institutional construction of identity, which assumed the students to be lacking resilience, lacking responsibility, and lacking knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors. The cross-case analysis was intended to provide a snapshot of student identity, and it revealed that while socialization practices at Riverside focused on cultivating students’ resilience and academic self-efficacy, it was an area of socialization that was not necessary. Many of the students demonstrated academic resilience—which I identified as confidence in one’s academic ability or positive concept about being a student—before they even attended Riverside.

With respect to knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors, students’ responses indicated that they had both college aspirations and family support. In the area of academic responsibility, defined partly as completing tasks and handing in homework, many students showed lack of responsibility. This was the area that showed the most variation. However, given the school’s focus on “flexibility” and “growth,” these responses and behaviors aligned with how socialization practices were designed and implemented. Specifically, Riverside lacked accountability structures and academic socialization practices that addressed task completion. My analysis revealed that, given these broad snapshots of student identities and academic behaviors, the socialization practices at Riverside did not meet all of the needs of many of the students in Thompkins’s AP English class.

The two case studies presented in Chapter 7 revealed misalignments between the socialization practices and the needs and identities of students. In the case of James Sullivan, the focus on socio-emotional support through the growth model imposed a
constraint on academic development. The classroom data and interview analysis reveal that Sullivan was not “academically fragile,” i.e., he had resilience and confidence in his academic abilities. However, given the institution of the growth model in the English department, Sullivan was able to “game the system” by handing in late work. This practice constrained opportunities for him to be challenged academically. And in the case of Leroy Blackwell, the focus on socio-emotional support and reward systems served to create a tension between classroom expectations and school-level expectations. The broader school-level policies of Living Peace and SBI served to construct Blackwell as a successful student by rewarding him for “school-ready” behaviors, while the privileging of socio-emotional socialization failed to hold him accountable for classroom behaviors by allowing him to continually miss class or arrive late. The focus on socio-emotional socialization also gave Blackwell opportunities to negotiate his grade in Thompkins’s class; and instead of accepting the authority of Thompkins’s classroom management and grading decisions, Blackwell appealed to other teachers in the department, namely Ted O’Brien and Jane Park, who both demonstrated a strong missionary complex toward teaching students at Riverside.

It is important to consider how Black male academic identity was conceptualized and how socialization practices were designed and implemented at Riverside for these male students. The school-wide intervention Minority Mentoring Brotherhood was put in place to address male achievement and perceived deficits. However, since the policy focused on reframing belief systems about academic identity—specifically cultivating positive attitudes about academics and “looking smart” as well as violence prevention—it did not address the needs of Sullivan or Blackwell. Neither student felt hesitancy about appearing
smart in class nor displayed behavioral issues. An assumption of Minority Mentorship Brotherhood was that positive male role models were lacking in the communities and home lives of Riverside’s Black male students. As such, the program was designed to utilize the male staff and teachers at Riverside who could serve as mentors and to reframe Black male identity by showing males at Riverside that masculinity could also be tied to academics, pride in one’s intellect, and avoiding physical altercations. Through this program, male students at Riverside were racially constructed as being prone to violence and behavioral altercations, not valuing intellect or academics, and having cultural and family deficits. These ideological underpinnings rendered Riverside’s socialization practices inadequate because they did not provide enough differentiation to address needs of these students.

8.2 Interrogating Ideologies of Racism

Leonardo (2009) suggested that schools operate as a “racial state apparatus (RSA),” such that “school is a material institution where race takes place, where racial identity is beauracritized/modernized, where people are hailed as racialized subjects of state” (p. 42). Despite the fact that the ideologies and discourses at Riverside revealed a strong theme of paternalism toward Black students, their families, and their communities, many Riverside staff believed they were doing right by their students. In fact, this veritable blind spot toward the staff’s own assumptions was exacerbated by the colorblind discourse prevalent at the school. Scholars have noted that schools are racialized spaces and that students’ learning is a racialized experience. However, even though the educators at Riverside posited that they were invested in teaching students and in the project of social justice,
they were not overtly aware of their own attitudes and assumptions—assumptions that carried material consequences for their students. Because ideologies and discourses have the power to shape reality, it is important to consider how they sustain cultural hegemony and promote practices of schooling that provide differential access to college for Black students. In the case of Riverside, I argue that ideologies and discourses served to sustain white cultural hegemony. A key example of this was that students were constructed as academically fragile, lacking responsibility, and lacking knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors. This was also evident in how many of the staff positioned themselves as saviors serving as missionaries for Black students. These ideologies distort and redirect how systems of oppression inform educational experiences for students as well as sustain deficit notions of Black students’ intellectual capacities and cultural backgrounds. Thus, providing equitable education for students begins not just with shifting practice, but with closely examining, critiquing, and interrupting the ideologies that inform practices—otherwise no real change can take effect.

The findings in this study suggest that discourses and ideologies have material consequences, and in the case of Riverside College Prep, these deficit-based discourses and ideologies unfolded as practices of remediation. This dissertation is one attempt to reframe the conversation concerning college-readiness, school reform, and academic socialization. As a counter-narrative to the prevailing discourse regarding college-readiness, it provides an avenue for discussing broader systemic phenomena in relation to a localized context and student experiences in one high school. While this dissertation provides a glimpse into the experiences and schooling practices of one school, it raises questions significant questions about how racism and racialized assumptions about Black students are present
in both teacher practice and professional discourse, how student agency is conceptualized, and the deep-seated nature of those assumptions. It also raises concerns about how urban schools function given some very prominent local and national discourses about schooling and urban reform.

8.3 Reframing the Discourse on Teaching Black Students

This dissertation highlights the ways in which Black students’ identities have been discursively constructed through language and discourse, thus revealing how language operates to shape reality. As ideology undergirds discourse, the dominant discourses serve to mediate socialization practices. Consequently, this dissertation’s immediate agenda with respect to education practice is to promote more critical engagement with the all too common discourses concerning Black students and learning, specifically in urban contexts. Until now, a prominent theme in the prevailing national and local discourses has posited the diminished capacity of Black students. As many scholars have noted, discourse (Apple, 1998, 2001; Gee, 1996; Giroux, 1994; Leonardo, 2009) and language (Bonilla-Silva, 2009) carry codified language that gives rise to reactionary practices. As such, an immediate proposition for schools in similar contexts is for educators to not only take a step back and have uncomfortable conversations about their belief systems regarding Black students, but also to intentionally shift the language about their professional practice, teaching, and the capacities of students to learn—language that is asset-oriented.

My experiences as a teacher educator and as researcher reflecting on the findings in this work, I am compelled to consider how we come to frame students, with respect to their academic capacities, their sense of self-efficacy, and resilience and what impact this can
have both immediately and in the long term on the students that we teach. Considering how language and practice shapes and directs the ways in which we come to address complex problems of cultivating the most effective learning environments for students, I can't help but think about how instructional and professional practice can shift through the ways in which we frame educational practice.

8.4 Rethinking Socialization Practices

Many scholars have examined the relationship between teachers’ attitudes and their students’ academic achievement (Delpit, 1998, 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Thus, setting high expectations is key to supporting students’ short- and long-term academic gains. Belief systems shape expectations. This dissertation deconstructs how ideologies and discourses at Riverside gave rise to school socialization practices that de-emphasized academic growth and privileged socio-emotional socialization—a result of the dominant assumption that students at Riverside needed repairing. The belief systems undergirding socio-emotional socialization, while couched in the language of kindness and responsiveness, hindered the academic progress of the two students represented in the case studies in Chapter 7.

For schools in similar contexts, a policy implication involves critically examining academic socialization practices and the ways in which they support or constrain academic growth and college-readiness. This requires a more focused examination of school structures, curriculum frameworks, and assessment policies. It is important to consider how academic outcomes and expectations are explicitly explained to students and how those expectations and outcomes are instantiated. The academic socialization practices at
Riverside, as my analysis showed, functioned to lower the academic expectations of the students. Consequently, college-readiness with respect to academic enhancement took a back seat to kindness and responsiveness.

In my view, it is imperative that high schools provide effective pathways to apprenticing young people into the world of adulthood by implementing policies that provide opportunities for leadership and critical engagement with the world, as well as cultivating habits of mind that promote independence and agency. Furthermore, it is important to examine how urban schools utilize resources and promote policies that don't focus on remediation or behavioral modifications. Critical educators have distinguished the importance of supporting students as their own critical agents of change and the effectiveness of empowerment through pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1993, 1998; Stovall, 2006b). It is important to examine critically how socialization practices are designed in schools. As this dissertation uncovered, the heavy reliance on behavior modification, supporting resilience (in the absence of supporting academic enhancement) and policies that focused on remediation constrained opportunities for academic growth and college-readiness.

Another important implication that emerges from this study is the need to understand Black students as having complex identities; after all, there exists uncountable variations among students, requiring the acknowledgement of their individual cultural and intellectual resources. Students are not just receptors of knowledge and socialization practices, but rather co-constructors of knowledge, active participants in socialization practices, and co-constructors of identities. This shift is ever urgent with high school students who, when they leave their high school building, will step into the world as adults.
As I reflect on the findings in this dissertation, I am compelled to think about how kindness and responsiveness was continually invoked by teachers, staff, and leadership at Riverside—and how this language is imbued in the work of RtI and other elements of instructional practice. This language of responsiveness, while not deleterious in and of itself, was undergirded by some deficit-based assumptions about Black students. This raised some questions for me, specifically: What does it mean to cultivate positive learning environments for students? Does being a good teacher mean that we should hold students accountable and not address or acknowledge their emotional needs? What does it mean to be a responsive teacher? How can we hold the highest expectations for students while at the same time address students’ immediate needs? As I listened to the respondents’ discuss their professional work, in many ways, I understood what their work meant to them.

As I reflect on my own teaching practices, my personal disposition and initial inclination, was to take care of my students. But I also know that even given that inclination, if I were asked what the most important part of my job was, I would say it was to prepare my students intellectually for the world that they encounter both in the present and in the future. Consequently, the most important questions that this work invokes for me are: What does it mean to truly take care of your students? How does one do so while maintaining high expectations? And how do we do so without essentializing students? This dissertation points to the significance of conceptualizing teaching both as reflective and an ideological practice. Ladson-Billings (2001) articulated that the assumptions of teachers and the potential divide between students and teachers are an important factor in how many Black students experience schooling. Other scholars have highlighted the deleterious
impact that ideological and racialized teaching practices can have on students (Delpit, 2006; Lewis, 2003; Tatum, 1999).

8.5 College-Readiness for Black Students

College-readiness has emerged as the new catchphrase in education reform. These discourses of college preparation have been enacted through national standards shifts, embodied in the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, and reflected in a renewed urgency for individuals to maintain a competitive advantage in the global market. However, the notion of college-readiness is also complicated, misunderstood, and interrupted by a set of contradictory and problematic assumptions about Black students, their families, and their communities. While schools that explicitly promote college-readiness are perceived as the golden ticket to social transformation and social mobility, those same schools can in many instances be sites of cultural reproduction and instantiations of cultural hegemony and white epistemologies. As this dissertation suggests, the discourse concerning college-readiness is yet another example of the cultural reproduction of white epistemologies.

To prepare students for college success, college-readiness literature stresses the importance of rigorous academic coursework and academic knowledge in conjunction with the socio-emotional development of students. While Riverside provided some positive and responsive mechanisms for addressing students’ socio-emotional needs, these socialization practices were not balanced with academic expectations.

The quest for educational parity is a long-standing struggle for many Black communities, and it is embedded in a long history of resistance, agency, and social assertion. This is evident in the overarching narrative of uplift and agency reflected in the
historical experiences and literary traditions of Blacks in America (Morrison, 1992; Perry et al., 2004). While the rich tradition of “literacy for freedom and freedom for literacy” (Perry et al., 2004, p. 12) continues to operate as the larger metanarrative of literacy and education in many Black communities, the ways in which Riverside conceptualized college-readiness did not acknowledge or consider this cultural resource. For example, many of the students in Thompkins’s class demonstrated a desire to gain access to college and to intentionally seek our schooling experiences that would provide them with appropriate college-ready educational experiences. However, students at Riverside were constructed as lacking knowledge of college-ready behaviors. Rising Stars was designed to acclimate families and students to “practice” students’ eventual departure to college. The assumption that undergirded this policy was that families did not understand or value college enough, so they needed to be socialized into the idea of a student leaving the family to attend college.

As a recommendation for schools in a similar context, it is important for staff to acknowledge and truly believe in the intellectual capacities of their Black students in order to design a program of college-readiness that is effective and truly transformative.

I began this dissertation with an examination of how Riverside placed expectations on and articulated goals for students in the school mission—a mission that explicitly spoke to college-readiness. In examining how the mission of Riverside compares to my own educational experiences and those of my youngest brother’s—with the understanding that members of my family are lucky to occupy spaces of economic and social privilege—I found that college-readiness was not the end goal of our academic socialization. Instead, our socialization articulated broad goals of serving our communities and the world. As the
surge of urban charter schools that tout college-preparation indicates, college-readiness appears to be a problem particular to urban spaces and communities of color. What does college-readiness really mean? At Riverside—and, I argue, at many urban schools—college-readiness is seen as an explicit mission necessary to the education of Black students. As my analysis suggests, this is because college-readiness is something that they supposedly don’t value, and resiliency is something that they supposedly lack.

This dissertation represents a disruption in the accepted notions of college-readiness and reform of urban schools. I aim to shed light on how college-readiness and the discourse concerning college preparation are, in many ways, not new or transformative, but more of the same with respect to education initiatives and educational inequity. Furthermore, current ideologies, discourses, and practices indicate a need for more critical engagement and inquiry of schooling processes and the ways in which college-readiness is addressed in urban schools.

8.6 Limitations of the Study

No research is without limitations. One limitation of this dissertation is the use of only one charter school to examine socialization and identity development. Riverside College Prep may provide a limited representation of the kinds of ideologically undergirded socialization practices that can potentially operate in urban charter schools. While the findings in this study may not be generalizable, they do offer some significant insight on how systems of meanings are created through ideologically grounded, discursive practices. As such, my work offers useful avenues for future exploration of schooling processes in urban schools.
A second limitation of my analysis is that I did not further explore the nuanced differences in experience between male and female students in the case studies. The key area of focus in the case studies was an examination of student identities in relation to the *institutional construction of identity*. My analysis paid particular attention to resilience, responsibility, and knowledge of school practices and college-ready behaviors—identities with respect to academic practices. But my analysis focused on Black males and offered a very limited discussion of Black females. As such, this dissertation provides a limited view of how gender, race, and academic identity intersect.

A third limitation is that the socialization practices I examined only provided snapshots through the analysis of interviews, observations, and school-wide policies. The interviews were limited to the perspective of the speaker, and the policies provided just an indication of socialization practices. Moreover, my examination of socialization practices was confined to the school. Consequently, this dissertation does not account for academic socialization across non-school contexts.

A fourth limitation is that although I was intentional in unpacking ideologies, discourses, and hegemonic practices of schooling, I paid less attention to student ideology and discourse—and my examination of student academic identities was only with respect to the *institutional construction of identity*.

A fifth limitation is that I only considered academic socialization practices in the English Language Arts context. While I provided some broad snapshots of school-wide policies and practices, my primary focus was to examine academic socialization practices in one English Language Arts classroom. As such, any findings concerning academic socialization are
limited to that context. However, this dissertation provides useful avenues for looking at socialization practices more comprehensively, within and across disciplinary contexts.

A sixth limitation of this study is my reliance on self-reporting in interviews with various participants, more so in the case of teachers. My interviews with teachers in the English department allowed me to gain insight on their ideologies and belief systems; however, my analysis did not include observations or behaviors of those particular participants. Furthermore, I relied on student interviews to gain insight on student’s attitudes about their academic identities and their academic resilience. These self-reported experiences are subject to the same blind spot toward one’s own assumptions suffered by the staff at Riverside.

Despite these limitations, this study provides evidence that detailed study of ideologies, discourses, and practices at various levels in a school can reveal the troubling misconceptions about what it means to teach Black students; how these belief systems are articulated, practiced, and instantiated; and, most importantly, how these understandings and practices interrupt the schooling processes for students. This also suggests a moment of pause is needed before consuming college-readiness discourse and rhetoric without critical engagement in how college-readiness is structured for Black students in urban contexts.
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APPENDIX A

Student Interview Protocol

1. Why did you choose to attend RCP?

2. Did your parents or family support your decision?

3. Is your experience with teachers at RCP different from those you had in elementary school? How?

4. What are your parents’ expectations for you?

5. Where would they like you to be in five years?

6. How do they support you in this?

7. Tell me a little bit about your experience in elementary school.

8. What was your relationship like with your teachers in elementary school?

9. What do you think about the mission of RCP?

10. Do you think you strive towards that mission?

11. What is your relationship like with your teachers?

12. How often do you complete your homework assignments?

13. Do you complete most of the tasks in class?
14. Do you come to class prepared?

15. What do your friends think about school? Are they good in school?

16. What kind of student do you think you are?

17. Do you like school?

18. What is your favorite subject? Why?


20. What do you think about English class? What kind of student do you think you are in English?

21. Where do you see yourself in five years?
APPENDIX B

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Why did you become a teacher?

2. What do you feel is the most important part of your work?

3. What is your philosophy as a teacher?

4. Why did you choose to work at RCP?

5. How do you perceive the mission of RCP?

6. Do you think it is an appropriate goal?

7. How do you (or don’t) enact the mission of RCP?

8. What do you see as your role at RCP?

9. How do you think you enact this?

10. What do you think your students need?

11. How do you feel you address that?

12. How do you as a teacher best support your students?
APPENDIX B (continued)

13. What is your ultimate goal for your students?

14. What do you think makes a good student?

15. Where do you see your students in 5 years?
APPENDIX C

Principal/Administrator Interview Protocol

1. Why did you decide to become an administrator?

2. What do you feel is the most important part of your work?

3. Why did you choose to work at RCP?

4. How do you perceive the mission of RCP?

5. Do you think it is an appropriate goal?

6. How do you (or don’t) enact the mission of RCP?

7. What do you see as the most important institutional goal for RCP?

8. When you hire a teacher, what things do you look for?

9. What do you think makes a good teacher?

10. What type of teachers do you think are needed at RCP?

11. As an instructional leader what do you emphasize to your teachers?

12. How is professional learning enacted at your school?

13. What are your priorities when it comes to training teachers at your school?
APPENDIX C (continued)

14. Where do you see yourself in five years?

15. What do you think the students at RCP need?

16. How do you support this need?

17. What is your ultimate goal for both teachers and students at RCP?

18. Where do you see your students in five years?
## Staff Interview Log

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Edward Saint-John</td>
<td>President Co-founder</td>
<td>Interview # 1</td>
<td>September 2, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ken Grayson</td>
<td>Chief Operating Officer Co-founder</td>
<td>Interview # 2</td>
<td>September 17, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jason Thompkins</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
<td>Interview # 3</td>
<td>September 24, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cynthia Banks</td>
<td>Principal</td>
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<td>September 24, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brad Dunlay</td>
<td>Writing Resource Teacher Online Credit Recovery Teacher</td>
<td>Interview # 5</td>
<td>October 1, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve Bradshaw</td>
<td>English Teacher Department Co-chair</td>
<td>Interview # 6</td>
<td>October 1, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ted O'Brien</td>
<td>English Teacher Department Co-chair</td>
<td>Interview # 8</td>
<td>October 29, 2010</td>
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<td>Jackie Reynolds</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane Park</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
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<td>November 3, 2010</td>
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<td>Jason Thompkins</td>
<td>English Teacher</td>
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<td>May 31, 2011</td>
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### APPENDIX E

Student Interview Log

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<td>Tina Brown</td>
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<td>Jasmine Thomas</td>
<td>Interview # 2</td>
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<td>Tanya Davis</td>
<td>Interview # 3</td>
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<td>Cameron Smith</td>
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<td>Ebony Johnson</td>
<td>Interview # 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Sullivan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madison Williamson</td>
<td>Interview # 7</td>
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<td>Bethany Smith</td>
<td>Interview # 8</td>
<td>January 28, 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcela Jackson</td>
<td>Interview # 9</td>
<td>February 4, 2011</td>
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<td>Nathan Taylor</td>
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<td>February 4, 2011</td>
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<td>Leroy Blackwell</td>
<td>Interview # 11</td>
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<td>Keisha Jones</td>
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<td>Laura Benson</td>
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<td>James Sullivan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leroy Blackwell</td>
<td>Interview # 15</td>
<td>May 5, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

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EDUCATION
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**REFEREED PUBLICATIONS**


**REFEREED PRESENTATIONS**


annual conference of the American Educational Research Association annual Conference. Chicago, IL.


Majors, Y., Ansari, S., & Kim, J. (February, 2006). *Isn’t it racist to say we need more Black teachers?: Youth cultural socialization within and across contexts*. Paper presented at the annual Research Assembly Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English. Chicago, IL.


PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Educational Research Association
National Reading Conference
National Council of Teachers of English
NCTE Assembly for Research

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