SOMOS LATINOS: THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINO STUDENTS AT AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

Derrick Gay

A DISSERTATION

in

Educational and Organizational Leadership

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

2016

Supervisor of Dissertation:

______________________________
Sharon M. Ravitch, Senior Lecturer

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

______________________________
Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

Sharon M. Ravitch, Senior Lecturer

Peter J. Kuriloff, Professor of Education

Harold Eugene Batiste, III, Senior Consultant, Creative Catalysts, Washington, D.C.
ABSTRACT

SOMOS LATINOS: THE EXPERIENCES OF LATINO STUDENTS AT AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

Derrick Gay
Sharon M. Ravitch

Latinos currently represent the largest, youngest, and fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. This significant demographic shift, however, has yet to manifest fully in independent schools, where Latinos represent the smallest ethnic demographic. While independent schools have increased efforts over the past three decades with regard to outreach, recruitment, enrollment, and retention of students of color, these diversity initiatives largely focus on supporting the psychological well-being of Black students and their families (Arlington & Stevenson, 2003; Steele, 2003; Tatum, 2003). Accordingly, schools largely ground their diversity frameworks to reflect Black racial identity models and experiences, which do not always correlate with the cultural needs or historical lenses of Latinos.

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the ways in which Upper School students, who self-identify as Latino, understand their academic and social experiences at a K-12 independent school with an institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion, located in a Metropolitan area in the United States. Through intentional and targeted recruitment efforts, the school has effectively increased its Latino student population. The study found, however, that Latino participants encounter ongoing social
and academic racial microaggressions, macroaggressions, and microinvalidations informed both by their Latino identity and intersections of race, gender, socioeconomics, and entry point. Participants highlighted the critical importance of safe spaces, Latino affinity groups, Latino representation within the curriculum, and a designated faculty member to support their ability to navigate the school and develop positive racial identity.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii

List of Tables ......................................................................................................................................... vii

List of Illustrations ............................................................................................................................ viii

Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1

  Organization of the Study ................................................................................................................ 5

  Context and Setting ............................................................................................................................ 7

  Research Questions and Significance .............................................................................................. 11

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework ............................................................. 15

  Independent Schools ....................................................................................................................... 15

  Diversity Efforts in Independent Schools ....................................................................................... 17

  Hispanics/Latinos in the United States ............................................................................................ 20

  Hispanic/Latino Ethnic/Racial Identity .......................................................................................... 22

  Latino Racial Models ...................................................................................................................... 24

  Racial Microaggressions .................................................................................................................. 26

  Stereotype Threat ............................................................................................................................ 29

  Racial/Ethnic Socialization Theory ............................................................................................... 30

  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 31

  Conceptual Framework ................................................................................................................... 33

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design ................................................................................ 37

  Participant Selection and Selection Criteria .................................................................................. 39

  Data Collection and Sequencing ..................................................................................................... 39

  Focus Group Pilot Study .................................................................................................................. 40
Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature ................................................. 104

Microaggressions and stereotypes ........................................................................ 106

Latino and Latina racial identity orientations ....................................................... 109

Implications for Riverfront: Study Recommendations ........................................ 113

Reconfigure the role of Latino Student Coordinator .......................................... 116

Expand and diversify Latino outreach models ..................................................... 117

Buttress Latino Affinity Group and institute formal mentoring program ............ 118

Provide ongoing faculty development and student and parent education ........ 120

Hire Latino faculty and integrate Latinos into the curriculum .......................... 121

Limitations of Study/Considerations for Future Research ................................. 121

Appendix A: Child Assent Form ........................................................................ 125

Appendix B: Faculty Consent Form ................................................................. 126

Appendix C: Latino Parent Association Talk to Frame Research ....................... 127

References ......................................................................................................... 130
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 *Latinos and Latinas Racial Identity Orientations* ........................................ 25
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Conceptual framework graphic ................................................................. 34
Chapter 1: Introduction

Demographics in the United States have changed and will continue to change significantly with the current White racial majority expected to shift by the year 2043 (Yen, 2012). Of the 308.7 million participants in the latest 2010 United States Census, sixteen percent self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, defined as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (United States Census Bureau, 2010, p. 2). While the Latino presence in the United States has increased, the Latino achievement gap has deepened (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Murphey & Ramos, 2016). This should not suggest, however, that education is unimportant to Latinos. A 2009 Pew Hispanic Center Research report noted that 89% of the Latino young adults surveyed agreed that a college education was important for success in life, yet only 48% envisioned themselves enrolling in college (López, 2009). A sampling of the reasons participants cited for not continuing school included the need to support family, a dislike of school, and a perception they did not need additional education for the jobs they intended to pursue (López, 2009). While Latinos, similar to other ethnic groups, recognize the potential of education to serve as a vehicle to access economic, social, and political mobility required to realize the oft-touted American Dream, the achievement gap persists for a number of reasons beyond the scope of this study. Fortunately, informed by the increased visibility of Latinos as a function of their increasing numbers, there have been renewed educational efforts to enhance Latino educational attainment. In a similar fashion, independent schools, leveraging strategic initiatives around diversity and inclusion and 21st century learning goals, intentionally
increased efforts to foster school communities that more accurately reflected the growing Latino population.

As part of their efforts to extend private education to historically marginalized groups, independent schools, which are predominately White, are in the nascent stage of deepening admissions efforts to attract and retain Latino students (National Association of Independent Schools, 2013). Through active recruitment of families of color and the designation of funds for financial aid for middle class families, students of color now comprise 29% of independent school enrollment (National Association of Independent Schools, 2015). Within this student of color demographic, African American students comprise 6.2%, Asian and Pacific Island students comprise 9%, and multiracial students comprise 7.5%. Latinos, the subject of the current research, comprise 4.5% of the independent school student population and has steadily risen over the last decade (National Association of Independent Schools Stats, 2015). Under the leadership of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), there has been a strategic and intentional recruiting effort to increase the number of Latino students in independent schools. NAIS leadership has proven instrumental in broadening independent school racial and ethnic diversity initiatives beyond conventional framings that focus primarily on Black students, often to the exclusion of other groups of color, including Latinos.

A K-12 independent school located in a major metropolitan area in the United States, hereinafter known as Riverfront for the purpose of this study, is an example of an independent school engaged in long-standing diversity and inclusion efforts. Leveraging intentional admissions strategies, support from the head of school, and ongoing efforts of the Latino Student Coordinator, Riverfront prioritized attracting and retaining Latino
students as part of the commitment to its mission to foster an inclusive school community (Riverfront School Documents, 2011). In this regard, Riverfront has made noteworthy strides, evidenced by the significant increase in Latino students over the past decade (Riverfront School Documents, 2015). Notwithstanding, the school acknowledges a need to deepen efforts to support the academic and social sense of inclusion for Latino students and their families once they become a part of the Riverfront community. Anecdotal evidence that Latino students and their families shared with each other and with trusted faculty advocates over the years during affinity group meetings and other informal occasions informed this acknowledgement. Their personal stories and perceptions referred to specific instances and ways in which their Riverfront social and academic experiences were frequently mediated through limited understanding of Latino experiences from members of the school community. These assumptions often manifest as microaggressions, the insidious yet pervasive ongoing stereotypical verbal, behavioral, and environment assumptions and expectations that communicated the view that Latinos are not equals (Wing Sue, 2010).

Specifically regarding diversity, Riverfront heeded the NAIS inclusivity model by sustaining a concerted effort to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of its student body. Recognizing both the growth of the Latino population within the region as well as the school’s mission-specific commitment to diversity and inclusion, one of the primary goals of Riverfront’s diversity efforts was to attract and retain Latino students. To this end, Riverfront allocated resources, secured through a grant from a local foundation, to establish the position of Latino Student Coordinator, in hopes of institutionally supporting outreach, recruitment, enrollment, and retention of Latino students. This
faculty member also serves as an internal point person and primary advocate for Latino families, ensuring that the needs and concerns of Latino students and their families integrated into school practices and policies. Additionally, the Latino Student Coordinator oversees both the Middle and Upper School Latino affinity groups, which provide a forum for Latino-themed discussions in addition to affirming Latino student identity. In short, the role of Latino Student Coordinator is two-fold. First, to foster intentional relationships with Latino organizations, schools, churches, and key Latino community leaders to create a school community that mirrors the Latino presence outside the walls of the school. Second, the Latino Student Coordinator intentionally cultivates affinity, builds community, and provides support for Latino students as they navigate the challenges of reconciling their ethnic identity in a predominately White institution. The critical task of facilitating cross-cultural dialogue and supporting White students engaging with Latinos and other students of color in mutually respectful ways is through a broader diversity group, led by the Upper School Director of Diversity.

In hopes of fostering a critical mass of Latino students, Riverfront collaborates with A Better Chance (ABC), one of a number of advocacy groups dedicated to increasing students of color presence in independent school communities and to cultivating student and faculty compositions that better mirror current demographics in the United States. Additionally, Riverfront partners with a local foundation that supports regional educational initiatives to promote academic attainment for underserved populations. Finally, the Latino Student Coordinator, who, while not Latino, is fluent in Spanish, intentionally cultivates personal relationships with Latino neighborhood
organizations, churches, and Catholic schools, recognizing that linguistic challenges often complicate Latino families learning about independent schools.

**Organization of the Study**

The current research examined the ways in which self-identified Upper School Latino students understood their social and academic experiences at Riverfront, a K-12 independent school with an institutional commitment to diversity, situated in a metropolitan area in the United States. Organization of the dissertation includes five chapters: Chapter 1: Context and Setting, and the Research Questions and Significance of the Study; Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework; Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design; Chapter 4: Findings; and Chapter 5: Discussion. An overview of each chapter follows.

In Chapter 1, the context and setting section provides an overview of the specific independent school and the historical and institutional paradigm, which situates Latino identity at Riverfront School and informs the research questions. The research questions and significance frame and introduce the primary and secondary research questions that the study explores, while also articulating the benefit of the research and findings for Riverfront, other independent schools, school inclusion efforts around Latinos, and ongoing professional development for educational consultants serving as a resource to schools on issues of diversity and inclusion.

Recognizing that this research joins an iterative scholarly conversation, the Literature Review/Conceptual Framework explores relevant extant scholarly research, theories, and models, including the history and nature of independent schools in the United States and the subsequent evolution of diversity initiatives within those spaces;
iterative understandings of Hispanic/Latino ethnonym in the United States; Latino Racial Models; Racial Microaggression Theory, Stereotype Theory, and Racial Ethnic Socialization Theory; racial identity development; racial self-efficacy theory; and racial literacy theory. The section also introduces the conceptual framework that undergirds, frames, and captures the interaction between and among the research questions, and the theoretical framework situated at the intersection of an independent school institutional context within a macro United States social, political, and economic paradigm, significantly mediated by race and socioeconomics.

In Chapter 3, the Methodology and Research Design provides a plan and rationale for the actions that addressed the research questions. Phenomenological in nature, this research leveraged emergent design and qualitative instruments—observation and field notes, focus group, individual interviews, and a review of archival documents—to gather data to explore the research questions. This section further explicates the data analysis plan, informed by and grounded in the conceptual framework in addition to detailing the researcher’s role and validation issues.

Chapter 4, the Results, presents the most salient findings from the research. The findings create three sections: Section I: Transitioning to Riverfront; Section 2: Navigating Latino Stereotypes and Microaggressions; and Section 3: Survival.

Chapter 5, the Discussion, provides an analysis, connecting the findings to the conceptual framework and extant literature, while exploring implications and queries for further research.
Context and Setting

Riverfront is a K-12 independent school with a long-standing tradition of academic excellence. Situated in a metropolitan area in the United States, Riverfront comprises three divisions and a total school population of approximately 1,500 students. Located in a predominately White affluent community, Riverfront boasts tuition of approximately $25,000 per year (Riverfront, 2016). For the last decade, Riverfront has aggressively recruited and retained a more racially and ethnically diverse student body. In 2013, for example, students of color comprised approximately 26% of the student population, while persons of color made up 13% of Riverfront’s faculty and staff. Among the students of color, approximately 34% self-identified as Black, 34%; Asian-American, 13%; Hispanic, sixteen%; multi-racial, and 2% as other (Director of Admissions, personal communication, 2013). When the numbers were disaggregated, however, there is a deeper sense of the Hispanic presence relative to other racial and ethnic groups in the school. In the Riverfront Lower School, for example, there were 6% Latino students, with 3.6% Latino students in Riverfront Middle School, and 4% self-identified Latino students in the Riverfront Upper School (Latino Student Coordinator, personal communication, 2013). Similar to many independent schools, these statistics reflect those families that elected to self-identify during the admissions process. Because some families still perceive minority and/or people of color status as stigmatizing, the actual number of Latinos at Riverfront is potentially higher.

The Latino population at Riverfront is largely bifurcated along class and racial/ethnic lines. On one hand, there is the primarily affluent, full-paying White Latino élite from Argentina, Columbia, Venezuela and other highly industrialized countries.
Students from these families tend not to self-identify as Latino, typically do not speak Spanish in school, and blend seamlessly into Riverfront’s predominately White student population. These students typically do not attend the Latino Affinity group meetings. Conversely, there exists another group, composed primarily of families that receive financial assistance and largely from México, Central America, and other developing Latin American countries. These students are more likely to self-identify as Latino, proudly communicate in Spanish in school, and typically unable to assimilate as White because of their darker skin color or African or indigenous phenotype.

Over a number of years, the current Director of Diversity, who is Black and non-Hispanic, noted specific challenges regarding the experiences of Riverfront’s Latino population, most of which he perceived as beyond his area of expertise (Director of Diversity, personal communication, 2013). In an initial attempt to provide additional resources for Latino students, Riverfront created a new position to work in consultation with the Director of Diversity—the Latino Student Coordinator, whose responsibilities include the following:

- Identifying and developing new recruitment strategies for prospective Latino students.
- Increasing public awareness of Riverfront in the Latino community and building a strong school image.
- Successfully recruiting and enrolling Latino students, while adhering to Riverfront’s admissions policies.
- Teaching four sections (two per semester) of Spanish and Service.
- Researching, planning, implementing, and leading promotional educational outreach activities in the Latino community.
- Developing and exploring collaborative relationships with Latino professional and community organizations.
- Assisting the Admissions Director in the development and implementation of programs/events targeting prospective Hispanic students and families.
- Providing support to Hispanic families and students and assisting with student retention.
• Providing Spanish writing support for the Admissions Office (Director of Admissions, personal communication, 2013).

While the Latino Student Coordinator increased programmatic offerings by presenting Hispanic heritage assemblies in each division, inviting Mexican artisans and musicians to share their talents with students and staff, and supporting student affinity groups in the Middle and Upper schools, Riverfront continued to encounter school culture tensions as well as deeper systemic challenges. During affinity group meetings, for instance, students shared personal experiences of microaggressions by students and faculty members in addition to general perceptions that their ethnic background negatively impacted their social and academic experience at Riverfront (Riverfront affinity group minutes, 2013). Riverfront also recognizes structural challenges associated with the position. For instance, the Latino Student Coordinator currently teaches three classes in addition to managing another schoolwide resource, which leaves insufficient time to serve as an effective resource for students and families. Moreover, while fluent in Spanish, the Coordinator is not Latina and lacks formal training regarding issues related to diversity and inclusion, rendering her ill-prepared to facilitate affinity groups, provide programmatic and curricular stewardship, or plan strategically.

In my capacity as an international diversity consultant, I have served as a resource to Riverfront, working with various constituent groups to enrich community at the school. In efforts to seek outside expertise and secure data to inform how best to address challenges articulated by the Latino community at Riverside, we determined that my scope of work would include the design and execution of a school climate assessment to gather data regarding the ways in which Upper School Latino students experience Riverside.
In point of fact, Riverfront, in spite of its well-intentioned efforts, is not unique among institutions navigating the seemingly paradoxical coexistence of deep institutional involvement in diversity and inclusion efforts and perceptions of individuals and groups that feel a lesser sense of inclusion within the same institution (Hall & Stevenson, 2007). Riverfront acknowledges this reality and invites the opportunity to learn more about the experiences of Latino students and their families to inform and enrich ongoing diversity and inclusivity efforts at the school, which undergirds Riverfront’s engagement in this current phenomenological study.

It is commendable that the school advocates diversity appreciation, but what happens once students become community members? Many faculty and administrators have expressed concern that students of color at independent schools do not feel a similar sense of belonging relative to their White peers (Hall & Stevenson, 2007). Schools have responded, in part, by establishing affinity spaces, deepening efforts to create critical masses of students and faculty of color, and providing faculty development around issues of diversity and inclusion.

Additionally, both parents and students of color are often uncertain about the school’s academic, social, or financial expectations (Schneider & Shouse, 1992). For those students receiving financial assistance, many worry that school personnel might perceive their self-advocating as fostering dissent or expressing ingratitude, thus jeopardizing their financial aid. For others, identifying as Latino might make them vulnerable to a host of stereotypes and microaggressions, including assumptions about intelligence, class, or criminality (Wing Sue, 2010). Last, some regard diversity efforts in independent schools as a form of tokenism, whereby individuals of historically
marginalized groups must represent the entire race. This additional burden can produce a negative impact on self-esteem in independent school students of color (Hall & Stevenson, 2007).

Riverfront acknowledges that a number of Latino students and their parents have expressed not feeling authentically integrated into the school community, which begs the question, what is the nature of the lived experiences of Latino students at Riverfront. Current empirical data and research regarding the experience of students of color in independent schools primarily focused on the perceptions and experiences of African American students and their families (Arlington & Stevenson, 2003; Otley, 2005; Steele, 2003; Tatum, 2003). Perhaps as a result of the aforementioned historical Afrocentric framing of diversity, there currently exists a dearth of literature and empirical data that focus specifically on the Latino experience within the independent school setting. The current study addressed this chasm in the literature, building on an earlier pilot study in this sphere, which is discussed in greater detail in the methodological section.

**Research Questions and Significance**

In 2009, Pat Basset, then-president of the National Association of Independent Schools, convened a series of meetings with The New Vision Collaborative, a group comprised of heads of independent schools and college presidents. The aim of the group was to reflect on designing a comprehensive educational curriculum, ranging the full sixteen-year span from kindergarten until the end of college, to respond to the changing skills and competencies that successful 21st Century students would require. Among the critical skills identified by the group was global perspective, which Robert and Orvis (2010) defined as:
Developing open-mindedness, particularly regarding the values and traditions of others
• Developing facility with one international language
• Using technology to connect with people and events globally
• Developing social and intellectual skills to navigate effectively across cultures
• Using 21st Century skills to understand and address global issues
• Learning from, and work collaboratively with, individuals form diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in the spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue
• Leveraging social and cultural differences to create new ideas and achieve success. (p. 12)

Based on insights gleaned from The New Vision Collaborative, in conjunction with ongoing research concerning the nature and goals of 21st Century learning by the NAIS Commission on Accreditation’s Committee on Schools of the Future, the National Association of Independent Schools published A Guide to Becoming a School of the Future, a seminal curriculum resource that summarized relevant research and literature concerning 21st Century learning goals. Subsequently, Riverfront convened similar school wide planning sessions to consider strategies to integrate global perspective into strategic planning as the institution deeply and intentionally considered the implications for community life and diversity initiatives and goals.

As part of Riverfront’s diversity initiative, this current study examined the social and academic experiences of Latino students at Riverfront, a K-12 independent school with an institutional commitment to diversity, located in a metropolitan area in the United States. As the Latino population increases in the United States and Latino students increasingly enter the independent school system, there is a compelling urgency for schools to develop intentional strategies and initiatives to foster an inclusive environment that allows Latino students to flourish and to promote an environment wherein all
students have equitable access to the academic and social benefits of an independent school education.

Thus, based on insights gained during an initial pilot study, the details of which are provided in the methodological section; ongoing conversations with students, faculty, and parents at Riverfront about the experiences of Upper School Latino Riverfront students; and personal and professional research interests to promote greater inclusivity in independent schools, the following research questions guided this qualitative dissertation study:

RQ1. How do Upper School Latino students understand their overall experience at Riverfront, an independent school with an institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion?

RQ1a. How do Upper School Latino students understand their social experiences at Riverfront?

RQ1b. How do Upper School Latino students understand their academic experiences at Riverfront?

RQ2. To what extent, if any, do Upper School Latino students perceive that the intersection of their social identities, particularly socioeconomic status and race, mediate their experiences at Riverfront? And, if so, in what way?

These research questions aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of the social and academic experiences of Upper School Latino students at Riverfront with the goal of supporting ongoing diversity and inclusivity initiatives at Riverfront and providing additional insights to support educators and practitioners working in similar academic settings. A review of relevant extant scholarly literature, research, models, and theories
informed and framed the analyses of these data and generated a theoretical framework for the current research. The theoretical framework, in turn, served to support and inform the design of a broader research conceptual framework.
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A review of extant scholarly literature reveals a paucity of research that speaks directly to the experience of Latinos in independent schools because most of the literature reflects the nature of the Black experience only (Arlington & Stevenson, 2003; Kuriloff, Soto & Garver, 2011; Otley, 2005; Steele, 2003; Tatum, 2003). Notwithstanding, although dispersed among multiple scholarly domains, the literature does, in the aggregate, offer substantive insights concerning the nature of independent schools and the ways in which social identity, in general, and race and ethnicity, in particular, mediate the student experience. In particular, Latino racial identity formation, microaggression theory, and stereotype theory, coupled with literature around racial efficacy and racial literacy, provide scholarship to support the critical need to examine the historical and socio-political context that frames and informs a deeper understanding of the mutually reinforcing dynamics that undergird and differentiate the Latino student experience in independent schools. Thus, the theoretical framework draws on a review of literature from the following areas: Independent Schools; Diversity Initiatives within Independent Schools; Hispanics/Latinos in the United States; Hispanic/Latino Ethnic/Racial Models; Racial Microaggression Theory; and Racial/Ethnic Socialization Theory.

Independent Schools

Independent schools distinguish themselves from public and private schools in two critical ways. First, independent schools are self-governing, organized as nonprofit institutions overseen by a self-perpetuating board. In this respect, they differ from public schools, which receive federal and state governmental oversight; charter schools that function as hybrids but are ultimately responsible to the government; private schools that
include parochial schools governed by the diocese; and for-profit schools. As such, independent school have tremendous curricular autonomy that other schools do not enjoy. Secondly, independent schools are financially independent, charging tuition and often drawing on endowments to cover operational costs versus receiving public monies. While not directly regulated by the government, independent schools are nonetheless accountable to the parents and students that provide their tuition dollars (Independent School Management Collection, 2010). Indeed, it is perhaps the tuition costs that frame the perception of independent schools as *elitist*. Based on 2011-2013 data provided by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS, 2012), the median day school tuition ranged between $17,669-$28,500 and $19,491-$45,375 for boarding schools, a sum inaccessible to most American families.

Independent schools in the United States have been areas of contention from their inception in colonial times to contemporary debates as Americans struggle with the realization of the inequalities of our rivaling educational systems—public and private. Even Horace Mann, considered by most to be the father of public education in the United States, was solicitous about private education taking students out of the public system and rendering them disconnected and élitist (Cremin, 1957). These schools, founded by and originally meant to serve White, Protestant, and upper class boys, have a long history of academic excellence and deep connections to the most prestigious colleges and universities, which, in turn, facilitate access to social, cultural, political, and financial capital.

Acceptance to independent schools, however, has not always been assessed purely on academic merit. Independent schools also have an equally long history of exclusion.
As Bronson (2001) asserted,

Traditional independent schools of the Northeast excluded students based on their
race and religion. In the South, in reaction to mandated public school
desegregation following *Brown v. Board*, many independent schools were
founded for the exclusive education of white children (p. 471).

Indeed, prior to efforts to increase racial/ethnic diversity in the 1960s, independent
schools were largely intentionally closed educational systems reserved for wealthy White
Christian males, and designed to preserve the social, political and economic hegemony
for the same demographic (Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003).

**Diversity Efforts in Independent Schools**

Initial efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity in independent schools began
in 1963 when twenty-three headmasters of arguably the most selective independent
schools joined forces to establish A Better Chance (ABC), an organization dedicated to
extending admissions to economically-challenged but academically able Black, Latino,
and Asian students. During the first year, ABC selected fifty-five students of color to
complete their secondary education at the founding members’ schools (A Better Chance,
2013). Soon after, a number of similar programs emerged across the country, including
Prep For Prep, TEAK, Oliver, and Early Steps to name a few. The goals of these
programs addressed an urgent need to increase the student of color presence in
independent schools by explicitly identifying and supporting families and students of
color before, during, and after the independent school admissions process.

In the late 1980s, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), which
represents over 1,400 schools nationally, sanctioned diversity as a priority by establishing
an office and position dedicated to the task and inaugurating an annual People of Color Conference in 1986 to provide a safe space for members of all backgrounds to discuss issues of diversity and inclusion in independent schools (National Association of Independent Schools, 2013). In the early 1990s, NAIS codified and iterated the Principles for Good Practice for Equity and Justice (2012), specifically identifying and enumerating the various social identities that independent schools should strive to include and support in their communities, in addition to highlighting specific strategic initiatives to engender more inclusive school communities, to wit:

NAIS schools value the representation and full engagement of individuals whose differences include—but are not limited to—age, ethnicity, family makeup, gender, learning style, physical ability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. NAIS welcomes and celebrates the diversity of our member schools; we expect member schools to create and sustain diverse, inclusive, equitable, and just communities that are safe and welcoming for all; we recognize to do so requires commitment, reflection, deliberate planning and action, and ongoing accountability. The following NAIS Principles of Good Practice for Equity and Justice provide the foundation for such an independent school community. (p. 1)

In a similar fashion, a number of independent schools adopted mission statements highlighting their commitment to diversity and inclusion, while indicating racial and ethnic diversity as a priority. The Town School, a K-8 coeducational independent school located in Manhattan, New York, outlined broad commitment to diversity and inclusion as:

The Town School defines diversity as a focus on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic level, sexual orientation, physical ability, family structure, and religion. Diversity is a reflection of the way the world really is, and we acknowledge diversity as encounters with differences, both profound and simple. It is through these encounters that growth and education unfolds, and it is why diversity is so important to our school. (The Town School: Diversity, 2014, para.1).
Similarly, the Hamlin School, an all-girls’ independent school located outside of San Francisco, underscored its commitment to all forms of diversity, noting:

We are a vibrant, inclusive community where diversity of thought and experience is respected and viewed as essential to excellence. We welcome and benefit from the perspectives of people who differ in culture, ethnicity, family structure, financial capability, learning style, physical ability, race, religion, and sexual orientation. At Hamlin, myriad voices speak and are heard; active engagement of all is expected and important for the strength of the Hamlin community. Our shared values bind us together. Our interdependence and our individual differences are worthy of celebration. (*The Hamlin School*, 2014, para. 2)

Despite these efforts, the representation of students of color remains an area for growth in independent schools if those institutions truly strive to foster educational communities that mirror the growing racial and ethnic diversity in the United States. In 2012, for example, Asians represented 7.9%, African American represented 6.1%, and Hispanics represented 3.8% of the independent school population (NAIS, 2012). It is worth noting that the actual number of students of color varies significantly by region, city/rural areas, and individual school commitment to diversity; thus, there is still a fair number of schools with representations of people of color that are more or less than these figures.

As independent schools increasingly recognized the universal benefits to all school constituents from increasing access beyond traditional school families, they also deepened awareness concerning the struggles encountered by students of color as a result of embedded institutional racism and unconscious bias. A number of recent documentaries have depicted these narratives and complicated dynamics. The documentaries, including *A Long Way from Home* (Kaury, 2006), *Prep School Negro* (Lee, 2012), *American Promise* (Brewster & Stephenson, 2013), and *I am not Racist, am I?* (Greene, 2013), reveal compelling and instructive personal accounts of the ways in
which race and ethnicity presented challenges for students and families of color. These challenges are congruent with the tenets and findings of critical race theory, White privilege, and research around microaggressions, which support the currency and various forms of social, economic, and political capital that our society and institutions ascribe to Whiteness (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Steel, 1997).

In short, while the contemporary racial and ethnic composition of independent schools is decidedly more heterogeneous since Horace Mann’s initial critiques, independent schools continue to grapple with cultivating diverse and authentically inclusive school communities. These efforts have proven particularly challenging as they pertain to attracting and retaining Latino students, a demographic that continues to be underrepresented in these spaces. Moreover, the nature of the Latino ethnonym in the United States is vast and iterative, encompassing multiple races (Black, White, Asian, Indigenous), countries of origin, and social classes, and requires a more sophisticated analysis and innovative strategies that transcend the conventional Black-White racial dichotomy often used in the United States.

**Hispanics/Latinos in the United States**

Broadly conceived, the term Hispanic refers to the culture, peoples, and nations with a historical and linguistic link to Spain, known as *Hispania* during the Roman Empire. The term often applies to countries once colonized by Spain, which represents most of Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama)—with the exception of Belize, which was colonized by the English— and South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela) as well as parts of the Caribbean (Puerto Rico, Cuba, and The Dominican
Republic, among others). In the United States, the term *Hispanic* is a relatively recent ethnonym that first appeared during the 1970 American census (Crese, Schmidley, & Ramirez, 2008). Similar to the United States Census (2010), the current research uses the terms Hispanic and Latino interchangeably. Recognizing the discursive nature of race and subsequently ethnic labels, it is not surprising that the understanding of this definition changed with each subsequent census. Even more frustrating is the lack of consensus in the United States, even among various organizations, regarding who constitutes a Hispanic. The 2010 Census, for instance, describes Hispanic as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Origin is broadly defined as heritage, nationality, lineage, or country of birth of the person. Accordingly, people who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may belong to any race (United States Census, 2010).

When considering Hispanic identity in the United States’ context, it is critical to conceive of this group as an ethnicity—a social group of people based on shared perceptions of identity grounded in common ancestral, social, cultural, or national experience—and not as a race. The 2000 Census recognized five racial categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, while also providing opportunities for citizens to identify as *some other race or two or more races* (Census, 2010). Acknowledging that Hispanics represent a number of races, the 2010 Census was explicit in noting, “For this census, Hispanic origins are not races” (p. 13). The intersection of multiple races and notions of Hispanic identity requires an examination of the ways in which society confers access to resources to those considered White, while actively denying that access to people of color.
(McIntosh, 1989; Wise, 2005). These insights and conceptual framing are critical in understanding how Hispanics perceive their identity and construct meaning in the United States, in general, and in predominately White spaces, in particular.

**Hispanic/Latino Ethnic/Racial Identity**

Racial development and identity consider the ways in which individuals and groups reconcile the surrounding racial order and its constructs (Romeo, 1997). This conception essentially leaves individuals with three choices—they can accept and internalize racial stratification, resist it, or transform and reappropriate it. Hispanic identity, which represents diverse numerous races, cultures, nationalities, and traditions, does not correlate with the US racial binary of black and white, which presents a number of challenges. Moreover, intergroup Hispanic heterogeneity is often overlooked in most social science literature, which rarely distinguishes between the numerous nationalities, cultures, and races that are subsumed under the ethnic category, Hispanic. To be sure, this dynamic met with considerable resistance, as Romero (1997) wrote:

> The reduction of Mexicans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans Costa Ricans, and other groups to the single category “Hispanic” has met with resistance. There are two main objections: one is the depoliticization of each group’s distinct history with the U.S (colonized, conquered, exploited, etc.): the other is the emphasis upon Hispanic (European) culture and ancestry, rather than African and indigenous cultures. (p. 15)

The largest Hispanic subgroups in the United States are of Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban origin, with Mexican Americans comprising over two-thirds of all Hispanics and Puerto Ricans comprising one-tenth. As Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) asserted, “These national origin subgroups are diverse in a variety of ways including geographic distribution, political affiliations, socioeconomic status, language use and many cultural features” (p. 36). Additionally, given that Hispanics trace their ancestry to the indigenous
peoples of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe in varying degrees, Hispanic groups vary in their familiarity with US racial constructs, wherein some are more likely to identify as White, and others as neither White nor Black (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). The impact is significant. For example, Caribbean Hispanics who identified as racially Black in the 1980 Census were highly segregated from non-Hispanic Whites, but less segregated from U.S. Blacks (Denton & Masey, 1989). The life experiences of Piri Thomas, celebrated Puerto Rican novelist, illustrated this dynamic in his autobiographical *Down These Mean Streets*, in which he explored the confusion that some Hispanics encountered navigating the racial binary and the monumental stakes associated with perceptions of Whiteness or Blackness. In the autobiography, dark-skinned Piri differentiated his experience from his lighter-skinned siblings, recounting how his classmates refused to perceive him as anything but black. This, in turn, impacted his family, who, recognizing the importance of Whiteness to secure upward mobility in the United States, desperately sought designation as White.

Similarly, in a study that assessed ethnic identity among children of one Mexican American and one European American parent, researchers found a negative correlation between the respondents’ perceptions regarding the degree to which they resembled a *typical Mexican* versus a *typical White* (Weinstein, 1998). This suggested a racialized concept of the nature of being Mexican as mutually exclusive from being White. In a similar study, researchers found that participants with Mexican origins and higher socioeconomic status, both domestic- and foreign-born, were more likely to self-identify as White versus those with mestizo-mixed European and indigenous heritage (Massey & Denton, 1992). Not surprising, color, colorism, and racism—in the sense of espousing a
preference for White and a rejection and under appreciation of African and indigenous ancestry—is pervasive. In efforts to understand the complex nature of Latino racial identity, scholars proposed a number of models explored in the next section.

**Latino Racial Models**

Racial identity models emerged organically from a deeper understanding of social theory, which posited that membership in social groups served as a critical framework for conceiving notions of one’s identity. Phinney (2008) noted, “Identity is a complex, dynamic construct that develops over time as individuals strive to make sense of who they are in terms of the groups they belong to within their immediate and larger social contexts” (p. 98).

Specifically concerning Hispanic identity, Stavens (1995) compared it to a *labyrinth*, noting:

Linear and circuitous, inextricable and impenetrable, the maze—complex, curved, distorted, wandering, winding, with constant double tracks—is a map of the Latino psyche. The apparent confusion it projects is only an illusion, a mask that is designed to entrap the mind, a concealment ready to catch you, to fool your senses in spite of your most purified awareness. A metaphor of metaphysical ambiguity, a figure that changes according to perspective, it confuses, infuriates, and disorganized, but in its lack of organization, in its chaos, it is an example of perfected craftiness . . . We simultaneously incorporate clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity. (p. 93)

Indeed, as a function of the multifaceted nature of Hispanic ethnicity, comprising numerous nationalities, traditions, races, and sociopolitical narratives, *Hispano/Latino* does not fall squarely into the U. S. binary. While most models imply a sequential path through various stages in one’s racial development (e.g., Cross, 1995; Helms, 1995) or straddle the Black/White binary, Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) presented a Latino Racial Model that honored the unique characteristics and diverse backgrounds found among
Hispanics. Their model, noted in Table 1 below, employed the metaphor of a lens toward identity, describing how individuals preferred to self-identity, how others viewed Latinos as a group, how some perceived Whites, and how persons conceived of notions of race.

Table 1

**Latinos and Latina Racial Identity Orientations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Lens</th>
<th>Identity as prefer</th>
<th>Latinos are seen</th>
<th>Whites are seen</th>
<th>Framing of race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino-integrated</td>
<td>Wide</td>
<td>Individuals in a group context</td>
<td>Positively</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Dynamic, contextual, socially constructed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino-identified (Racial-Raza)</td>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>Latinos</td>
<td>Very positively</td>
<td>Distinct; could be barriers of allies</td>
<td>Latino/not Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgroup-identified</td>
<td>Narrow</td>
<td>Own subgroup</td>
<td>My group OK, others maybe</td>
<td>Not central (could be barriers or blockers)</td>
<td>Not clear or central; secondary to nationality, ethnicity, culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino as other</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Not White</td>
<td>Generally, fuzzily</td>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td>White/not White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undifferentiated/Denial</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>“Who are Latinos?,” Supposed color-blind (accept dominant norms)</td>
<td>Supposed color-blind (accept dominant norms)</td>
<td>Denial, irrelevant, invisible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-identified</td>
<td>Tinted</td>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td>Very positively</td>
<td>White/Black, either/or, one-drop; “mejorar la raza” (i.e., improve the race)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A critical distinguishing characteristic of the Ferdman Gallegos Latino Identity Model, relative to other United States’ racial identity models, is the conception of racial identity as secondary to ethnic identity. For example, a dark-skinned Panamanian who some might classify as *Black* in the United States would most probably perceive himself
or herself first as *panameño* upon arriving in the United States with *Black* as a secondary racial classification. Similarly, a blond-haired and blue-eyed woman arriving from Argentina would likely perceive herself as *Argentina* first with *White* as a secondary classification. Given the saliency of race in the United States and its significance in influencing one’s life chances, it follows that the fluid and amalgam-like nature of race among Latinos creates a complex and multilayered paradigm within which they conceive identity. Moreover, given the diversity and wide distribution of races within the Latino/Hispanic community, in a country where race still functions as the master status, it follows that the sense of Hispanic belongingness and connectedness within predominately White institutions varies significantly. One of the primary racial challenges for Latinos, and many people of color in predominately White institutions, is the insidious microaggressions.

**Racial Microaggressions**

Pierce, a psychiatrist and Harvard professor, originally coined the term microaggressions in 1970 in response to the changing nature of racism perpetrated against Blacks. Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzales, and Willis (1978) defined microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic non-verbal exchanges that are often ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders” (p. 66). While the Civil Rights Movement was undeniably effective in improving race relations and removing significant legal barriers that precluded Blacks and other people of color from realizing their full rights as American citizens, racist institutions, attitudes, and beliefs endured. The Civil Rights Movement also encouraged a shift from conventional forms of overt racism to more aversive and covert forms. For instance, instead of using an explicit racial epithet with a
person of Latino descent outright during an interaction, one might compliment a native-born, English speaking Latino American on his *good, unaccented English*. The assertion is rooted in the monolithic racial perception of all Latinos as foreign-born, Spanish-speaking individuals. In short, microaggressions capture the nature of post-Civil Rights manifestations of racialized attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, behaviors, and expectations.

Solórzano (2000) expanded on Pierce’s definition by framing racial microaggressions as subtle insults—verbal, nonverbal, or visual—directed towards people of color, often automatically or unconsciously. This characterization of microaggressions is noteworthy because it highlights the ways in which nonverbal behavior, such as avoidance, hostile body language, or intentional exclusion, also reflect and manifest racially biased views. Moreover, Solórzano expands a potential source of microaggressions at the subconscious level, beyond the awareness of the intentionality of the perpetrator. Notwithstanding, the level of awareness or intentional aim of the microagggressor to denigrate neither mitigates nor sanitizes the impact for the victim.

Finally, the most contemporary and arguably the most widely understood manifestation of the concept of microaggressions is that of Wing Sue (2010) who asserted that microaggressions are “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating message—verbal, nonverbal or environmental—to certain individuals because of their group membership” (p. 24). Wing Sue (2010) further sorted microaggressions into three categories representing the variation of awareness and intentionality of the perpetrator: a) *microinsults*, often unconscious messages that demean a person’s race; b) *microassaults*, often conscious and explicit racial derogations meant to hurt victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior and intentional racially discriminatory actions; and c)
microinvalidations, often unconscious communications that exclude or invalidate the experiences of people of color.

Wing Sue’s (2010) framing of microaggressions broadens the dynamic to encompass environmental microaggressions, or demeaning messages, initiated not by individuals, but rather by artifacts and social and cultural forces. Moreover, Wing Sue (2010) referred to environmental microaggressions as “numerous demeaning and threatening social, educational, political, or economical cues that are communicated individually, institutionally to marginalized groups” (p. 25). Therefore, potential environmental microaggressions in an independent school might include the omission of the accomplishments of Latinos from the curriculum, stigmatization, or pathologization of the Spanish language or culture. More specifically, Wing Sue (2010) identified microaggressive themes for Latinos, including ascription of intelligence, second-class citizenship, pathologizing of communication style/cultural values, speech characteristics, aliens in their own land, perceptions of criminality, and invalidation of the Latino experience.

The impact of racial microaggressions is critical in understanding the perceptions of Latino students in a predominately White independent school. Perceived discrimination links to psychological distress and higher levels of stress, which impacts academic and social inclusion (Wing Sue, 2010). Moreover, a sense of wellbeing is most strongly reflected in self-esteem (Moradi & Risco, 2006). Therefore, it follows that the perception of Latino students regarding their academic and social sense of belonging is mediated through their self-esteem or ability to counter microaggressions and other dynamics that threaten their sense of belonging in school. Another dynamic that threatens
Latino students’ sense of wellbeing, as well as potentially undermining their self-efficacy and academic achievement, is a stereotype threat.

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat describes the stress and consequences created by being at risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Put differently, when individuals find themselves in a situation they perceive as meaningful, they will, at a subconscious level, expend cognitive and emotional energies to dispel stereotypes. The individuals need not believe the stereotype as true; they need only be aware of the existence of the stereotype. Steele and Aronson’s (1995) research highlighted a noteworthy consequence of stereotype threat particularly relevant to the current research regarding the sense of academic and social inclusion of Latinos in a predominately White independent school. Research also suggested that stereotype threat encouraged underachievement on academic tasks and a reduced sense of belonging in the stereotyped domain (Good, Dweck, & Rattan, 2008a). Stereotypes, coupled with microaggressions, are particularly salient in providing a theoretical and conceptual framework to undergird the current study because they conspire to undermine a positive racial identity for Latino students at Riverfront, which could potentially result in both a lowered sense of academic and social inclusion as well as lowered academic performance. Equally critical in understanding the ways in which Riverfront Latino students perceive their social and academic experiences is a deeper understanding of the ways in which various racial groups are socialized differentially, which is captured by Racial/Ethnic Socialization Theory.
Racial/Ethnic Socialization Theory

Stevenson (2014) posited that Racial/Ethnic Socialization Theory represented the aggregate of verbal and nonverbal communication from families and societies that framed and defined norms for understanding and interpreting racial/ethnic conflict, progress, and resolution. Thus, within a context that continues to privilege Whiteness in the United States, racial socialization is the process through which a child learns from his family and community ways to “navigate a world marked by racial oppression” (Hanley & Noblit, 2009, p. 33). For instance, as a result of negative encounters with the police, many Latino and Black parents socialize their children, particularly their boys, regarding ways to interact with police to mitigate the possibility of being deemed as threatening or perceived as engaging in criminal behavior. As recently witnessed in high profile cases of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, these strategies could prove a determining factor in the life or death of persons of color in the United States. This parenting strategy is mediated through a racial framework that informs parenting for families of color in meaningfully significant ways that differ from parenting in White families.

This racialized conception of society, Stevenson (2014) argued, informed the interpretation of events as meaningful, positive or negative, or manageable. Within the context of the current research, if Latino students were socialized, for example, to understate or mute behaviors or the decibel level of their voice as a survival tactic in order not to be characterized as aggressive or assertive, this socialization would not serve them well in an independent school where the cultural norm encourages students to question authority. The consequence of this differential in socialization might result in
faculty perceptions of a disengaged student. Similarly, if Latino parents were similarly socialized, it could reduce the likelihood that they might advocate for their child with a White faculty member in a predominately White institution.

Brown and Tylika (2011) argued that racial/ethnic socialization could be leveraged to promote healthy strategies to manage racial stress. Stevenson (2014) similarly theorized that people of color could learn to manage racial stress effectively by recasting racial encounters. He identified three key competencies as:

Racial Self-Efficacy: The belief in one’s capability to read, recast, and resolve racially stressful encounters
Racial Coping: Racial cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage encounters that are perceived as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person
Racial Literacy: The ability to read, recast, and resolve racially stressful encounters through the competent demonstration of intellectual, behavioral, and emotions skills of decoding and reducing racial stress during social conflicts. (p. 115)

Parents and other significant adults in the lives of children of color have the potential to cultivate these competencies to counter the negative impact of racial stressors, including microaggressions, stereotype threat, and negative racial encounters.

Conclusion

The aim of the current study is to gain empirical evidence that may deepen understanding regarding Latino students’ perceptions of their academic and social experiences at Riverfront. An initial overview of extant scholarly literature offers insightful context and a theoretical framework to understand the social, political, and historical factors that inform Riverfront’s current landscape, policies, and patterns of behavior related to perceptions of inclusion for Latino students at Riverfront, including: the genesis and nature of independent schools; the saliency of class and race/ethnicity in the United States and independent schools; diversity initiatives within independent schools; and the
recursive nature of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

The experiences of Latino students are embedded in a larger independent school landscape with the genesis predicated on intentional exclusion of students based on race and class (Bronson, 2001). As a function of this model and the historic racial binary of Black and White in the United States, it follows that initial diversity efforts in independent schools focused primarily on increasing the number of Black students requiring financial assistance (A Better Chance, 2013). As diversity efforts matured, however, conversations around racial/ethnic inclusion broadened to include Latinos and Asians. An incremental increase in the Latino demographic (Census, 2010) also influenced efforts around greater Latino inclusion, coupled with greater Latino presence, agency, and advocacy in discourse in the United States.

The Latino/Hispanic ethnonym frequently used interchangeably both colloquially and in the literature, however, represents an ethnicity and not a race (Creese, 2008). Moreover, Latinos do not represent a monolith. This all-encompassing ethnicity represents individuals spanning numerous national origins, traditions, religions, and races, which have differentially-shaped experiences and perceptions in meaningful ways. This distinction is critical in informing the analysis of the experience of Latinos in schools because it suggests their experiences within these spaces might differ significantly based on their racial category, skin color, and socioeconomic status. Those who have lighter skin and more European features may experience school in very different ways from those who have darker skin and possess more indigenous or African features. Similarly, Hispanics belonging to an upper middle class or upper class background may experience fewer independent school challenges than do less affluent
Hispanics.

Similar to other groups of color in the United States, Latinos struggle with daily racial encounters of microaggressions and stereotype threat, which potentially undermine the racial and ethnic sense of inclusion among Latinos. Within a predominately White academic institution, these dynamics collude along with other racial stressors in significant ways potentially to undermine academic achievement, a full cultivation of racial and ethnic identity, and a positive sense of inclusion within the school. Potential strategies to counter these negative forces, as indicated throughout the literature review, could include leveraging racial/ethnic identity and cultivating racial self-efficacy and racial literacy. The subsequent section, which explicates the conceptual framework, embeds the theoretical framework into a larger social, political, historical, and environmental context, while also exploring the intersection with additional variables that collude to inform the social and academic experiences of Latinos in predominately White independent schools.

**Conceptual Framework**

Thus, the conceptual framework for the current research, illustrated below, integrates and leverages the theoretical framework outlined as heuristic, and examines the ways in which multiple research variables interact between and among each other to frame and inform Latinos’ understanding of their experience at Riverfront.
Hence, the conceptual framework for the current research subsumes and acquires information from the interaction between and among: the evolving nature of independent schools and diversity efforts within this domain; the recursive nature and understanding of the Latino and corresponding Latino identity models; and a theoretical framework that includes microaggression theory, stereotype theory, racial identity development, racial
self-efficacy theory, and racial literacy theory. These dynamic interactions exist at the intersection of an independent school institutional context within a macro United States social, political, and economic paradigm, significantly mediated by race.

The current research is significant for institutional reasons as Riverfront seeks to foster an inclusive school environment for all its members, including Latinos; professional and personal reasons for me, both as the researcher and a man of color, as I continue to serve as a resource to schools to foster inclusive school communities and personally navigate the independent school world; and for independent schools and other educational institutions as they advance strategic plans around community life, diversity, inclusion, and 21st century goals and deepen their understanding of the ways in which Latinos, an increasingly larger demographic in the United States, interact with schools.

Regarding inclusivity initiatives in independent schools, if schools continue to operate under the assumption that authentic inclusivity is organic or that simply bringing difference together will foster inclusive communities by osmosis, students from historically marginalized groups—including Latinos, Blacks, Asians, students who receive financial assistance, to name a few—will continue to experience independent schools differently from the largely White majority. Specifically regarding Latinos, potential implications from this research may suggest that schools need to learn more about the complex racial/ethnicity nature of Hispanics, which falls outside of the conventional Black and White binary framing. Given the rising Hispanic population in the United States, schools may discover that there are also potential fiscal implications as well in not cultivating communities that are conducive to the fastest-growing and increasingly deep-pocketed ethnic group in the country.
Moving forward, there is a critical need for additional and more rigorous data on the experiences of Hispanic students in independent schools. Currently, most diversity research on the experiences of students of color in independent schools focuses on the experiences of Black students, especially Black boys. There is also a growing number of studies on the experiences of Asian students, in large part as a result of the model Asian minority meme and the popularity of the Tiger Mom, the stereotypical Asian mother who designs an academic plan for her children before they are born in hopes of realizing the golden prize of Harvard, Princeton, or Yale. As for research examining the ways in which Latinos understand their social and academic experiences in independent school spaces, there is considerably less empirical data. This is certainly an area that warrants more research if independent schools are indeed earnest in their desire to cultivate inclusive school communities.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

Riverfront’s mission informs its belief that every student, independent of his or her background, deserves the right to receive a high-quality education and to be treated with respect and kindness (Riverfront Mission, 2016). Notwithstanding, Riverfront acknowledges that, based on prior diversity efforts with African American and LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer/Questioning) students, notions of identity and the ways in which these identities manifest in a stratified society that ascribes differential value to identity do indeed impact the social and academic experiences of students at Riverfront. Grounded both in Riverfront’s institutional assumptions, individual perspectives, and experiences, the current study plans to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Latino students at Riverfront. Accordingly, the study coupled two qualitative approaches: phenomenology and constructionist grounded theory.

This study is phenomenological because it explores and describes the common meaning of several individuals about their lived experience at Riverfront, a K-12 independent school located in metropolitan area in the United States (Creswell, 2013). While the experiences of Latino students are diverse and do not represent a monolith, it also holds true that their shared ethnic identity and positionality mediate their social and academic experiences and sense of inclusion in meaningful and similar ways. These specific manifestations emerged from the findings of the study and are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The study employed a qualitative methods design, which Creswell (2013) defined as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribing to a social or human problem. Accordingly, the study employed qualitative
observation with field notes, qualitative interviews, a focus group, and qualitative document analysis in the form of admissions data and other pertinent institutional archival artifacts. Although the research did not assume a working hypothesis or a priori theory, the initial research questions derived from a decade of institutional knowledge that the Latino Student Coordinator offered regarding Latino initiatives, experiences, and perspectives at Riverfront (Latino Student Coordinator Communications, 2015). I gleaned and incorporated these insights throughout the research process via ongoing conversations as well as through specific individual interviews. Finally, perspectives, insights, and themes that emerged from a previous focus group pilot study conducted at Riverside, discussed in detail in the focus group pilot study section, informed the research in exploring similar questions regarding the social and academic experiences of Latino students.

The impact of my expertise in diversity and inclusion and a decade of institutional data regarding the experiences of Latino students at Riverfront also influenced the interpretation and analysis of the data. Thus, the study incorporated a constructivist grounded theory approach, whereby the researcher’s views uncovered experiences with embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships, and made hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity visible (Charmaz, 2005). The experiences of Latino students are not objective; rather, they are subjectively constructed and embedded within a larger social paradigm. Last, the research followed an emergent design, which facilitated the possibility for the research to develop in relationship to the data gathered and the meaning of these data (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007).
Participant Selection and Selection Criteria

Purposive sampling in qualitative studies assumes that one of the primary criteria for selection of individuals in research is their purposeful ability to inform understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013). There were 43 Upper School Riverfront students who identified as Latino during their initial admissions process. Because the study strived to understand the experiences of this population, all of the 43 Riverfront students who identified as Latino could participate in the study. As noted earlier, however, not all Latinos who self-identified during the admissions process shared their Latino identity at Riverfront, informed, in part, by a perceived association of Latino ethnicity with lower socioeconomic status. As a result, many of the wealthier, and often White, Latinos did not publicly identify as Latino at Riverfront. This dynamic was important for this study because it reduced the number of potential participants. Creswell (2013) posited that single-stage sampling was appropriate when the researcher had access to names in the population and could sample people directly. Eight students participated in an initial focus group pilot study, and sixteen students participated in individual interviews. Explication of participant selection for each method is in the respective sections below.

Data Collection and Sequencing

In an effort to generate a robust and comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Riverfront Upper School Latino students, the study leveraged triangulation, defined as multiple data collection sources, methods, and theories to corroborate evidence (Creswell, 2013). The study utilized the following methods: a focus group pilot study; sixteen individual interviews with Latino students, the Latino Student
Coordinator, and the Director of Diversity; observations with field notes, and the collection and review of archival documents, including admissions data, Riverfront Mission Statement, Riverfront Vision Statement, website information, Riverfront School Strategic Plan and Riverfront Diversity Strategic Plan. Additionally, throughout the course of the study, I maintained a research journal, from which I generated multiple research memos to aid my ongoing understanding and analysis of ideas, issues, and observations uncovered during the research.

In short, the overall data collection plan consisted of: a) a focus group pilot study consisting of eight Upper School Students who identified as Latino; b) individual interviews with sixteen Upper School students, lasting between 45-60 minutes each; c) ongoing observations and generated field notes; and d) archival review. The section below discusses each data collection method in greater detail.

Focus Group Pilot Study

Focus groups create an effective strategy to explore and clarify issues related to feelings, emotions, and perceptions (Rabiee, 2004). Different from individual interviews, focus groups leverage group dynamics to generate rich qualitative data (Britten, 1999). Moreover, focus groups are effective in generating data on collective or group views, in addition to common understandings and meanings that undergird these views (Kitzinger, 1994). Given the sensitive and potentially contentious nature of discussions on race and class within independent school communities, focus groups, as Glesne (2006) asserted, also had emancipatory qualities and provided voice to silenced experiences or augmented personal reflection, growth, and knowledge development.
Rubin and Rubin (2012) posited that semi-structured interviews were effective when the researcher had a specific topic, prepared a limited number of questions in advance, and followed up with additional questions. Moreover, focus groups created a space wherein participants could manifest and explore multiple perspectives on a similar experience (Glesne, 2006). In hopes of generating an effective interview protocol that would resonate in meaningful ways with Upper School Latino students, I facilitated a focus group pilot study with eight Upper School Latino students to identify relevant themes regarding their social and academic experience at Riverfront. The focus group pilot study protocol derived from previously collected survey data of the Riverfront Upper School students, described in the subsequent paragraphs.

As part of my scope of work as an education consultant, I designed and administered a climate assessment to the entire Riverfront Upper School, which consisted of approximately 600 students. The design of the anonymous survey, administered via SurveyMonkey, aimed to ascertain Upper School Riverfront students’ perceptions of their sense of belonging at school. Accordingly, the scope of the survey questions was intentionally broad, ranging from teaching and instruction, curriculum, and pedagogy, to student life, clubs, assemblies, advisory, athletics, and student interactions in non-academic settings. Also, as part of my Riverfront scope of work, I designed and conducted a research pilot, exploring the ways in which Upper School Latino students understood their social and academic experiences at the school. I explored this question using a qualitative-phenomenological design, consisting of ongoing observations and journaling, memo writing, a ninety-minute focus group, and four individual student
interviews. To generate specific findings for the Latino focus group pilot study, I used SurveyMonkey to disaggregate school wide data to generate Latino student data.

During subsequent analysis of these data, I identified the following themes as potential topics of exploration during the focus group:

- Specific ways in which students perceived that their Latino ethnicity mediated their experience at Riverfront
- The ways in which socioeconomics intersected with Latino ethnicity to influence student experiences at Riverfront
- The extent to which notions of Whiteness and colorism informed inter-group and intra-group perceptions and interactions
- The nature and pervasiveness of jokes about Latinos
- The extent to which Riverfront celebrated, tolerated, or stigmatized Latino culture/language
- The ways in which Latinos conceived the nature of being Latino. Conversely, how this group understood non-Latinos’ understanding at Riverfront regarding the nature of being Latino
- The extent to which gender intersected with Latino identity to influence Latino students’ experiences at Riverfront?
- Which persons participated in the Latino affinity group and why they participated
- Students’ perceptions of their parents’ sense of belonging at the school
- The extent to which Latino students saw themselves reflected in the curriculum

Leveraging my prior experience facilitating student of color focus groups in independent schools, I used an open-ended emergent design during the focus group pilot
study because the design allowed for changing questions or shifting focus based on the perspectives that emerged organically during the conversation (Creswell, 2014). Further distilling the aforementioned themes that emerged from the survey, I generated the following interview protocol questions, which I used to frame our discussion:

- How do you describe Riverfront to your friends and family?
- Do you speak Spanish? If so, do you feel comfortable speaking Spanish at Riverfront?
- During the school wide climate assessment, ninety-four percent of students noted having heard jokes of a racial nature at Riverfront. How many of you have personally heard Latino jokes? What is the nature of these jokes at Riverfront?
- How do you define Latino?
- How is Latino defined at Riverfront by non-Latinos?
- Do your parents feel part of the Riverfront community?
- Do you attend the Latino affinity group? If so, what role does it serve for you personally?
- What suggestions would you recommend to the administration to cultivate greater inclusion for Latino students?

Participant selection derived from those students who responded to a general invitation from the Latino Student Coordinator and this researcher to all Upper School Riverfront Latino students based on their self-identification during their initial admissions process. The communication indicated that the purpose of the discussion would examine the ways in which the self-identified Latino students understood their experiences at Riverfront as mediated by their ethnic heritage. I limited participation in the focus group
to eight students (Creswell, 2013), recognizing that groups with too few members risked limited discussion, while groups that were too large could potentially become unwieldy, challenging for facilitator to moderate, and unconducive to broad participation.

Among the eight students who participated in the focus group, seven were male and three were female. Within the Latino diaspora, six identified as Mexican, one Peruvian, one Columbian, one Cuban, and one Portuguese/Puerto Rican. Noteworthy, two Latino students also identified as White. In terms of grade level, the group included three freshmen, three sophomores, two juniors, and two seniors.

The Latino Student Coordinator and I co-determined a morning meeting time, recognizing the challenges of reconciling multiple schedules over four grades. We were also sensitive to the potentially stigmatic nature of students convening to discuss their Latino identity during school hours because the conversation would probably include exploring negative incidents and interactions that students would not want to reveal publicly. Thus, the Latino Student Coordinator and I identified a discreet meeting area on campus in hopes of mitigating this dynamic and encouraging robust and tension-free engagement during the focus group. We also determined that I, alone, would facilitate the focus group because the presence of Riverfront faculty might potentially stifle robust sharing and candor.

Finally, with regards to confidentiality, the Latino Student Coordinator and I articulated to the students the critical need of not sharing details of our discussion outside of the focus group. Likewise, we stressed that any insights or experiences that students shared would be in an aggregate or de-identified manner if used in the course of the research.
I recorded and transcribed the focus group using Rev, an online transcription service. After reviewing the transcript for accuracy, I analyzed the discussion through multiple readings. During the first reading, I underlined striking and recurring words, perspectives, emotions, and experiences. Thematic patterns soon emerged, noted in my ongoing journals. During subsequent readings and analysis, I made more extensive observations, which I categorized into groups and used as a structure for organizing and subsequently coding the interview. I also explicated the more salient observations into memos, which informed the overall analysis.

**Pilot Study Findings**

The results of the pilot suggested that Riverfront students who self-identified as Latino encountered a number of environmental, institutional, and social challenges and microaggressions informed by their ethnic identity, which undermined their sense of belonging at the school. The more salient concrete manifestations of exclusion included: a) conflation of all Latinos into one ethnic group—Mexican; b) disparaging jokes that framed Latinos as “illegal aliens” and “second-class citizens”; and c) environmental and institutional microaggressions, such as the omission of contributions of Latinos from the general curriculum, particularly in English, history, math, and science. A Peruvian student noted, for example, that on numerous occasions, members of his predominately White soccer team instructed him and another non-Mexican Latino team member to “run as if they were crossing the border” (Latino Focus Group, 2014). Other students noted that, during their tenure at Riverfront, they had never studied a Latino American work in English, nor had they learned about Latino America or contributions of Hispanics in the United States (Latino Focus Group, 2014).
During the focus group and interviews, students shared personal and powerful accounts of incidents that occurred in the cafeteria and hallways, on buses in route to academic tournaments, during assemblies, in locker rooms, music spaces—many within non-academic and non-faculty regulated spaces—wherein they perceived they were temporary guests instead of full-fledged community members. Moreover, the focus group participants and interviewees noted a number of instances of comments and actions initiated by adults in the community—parents, teachers, faculty and staff—that reminded them of their secondary status as a result of their race. For example, one student shared that on a number of occasions during opportunities when he sought content or conceptual clarification from teachers, he was asked if English was his mother tongue. The teachers’ assumption, he understood, was that he was not American born and that the root of his inquiry was linguistic and not conceptual in nature. Similarly, another student shared that during the rare occasions when there were references to Latinos in her history class, the narrative depicted Latinos as the abject immigrant disproportionately burdening the United States economy.

While the totality of the remarks was too numerous to share in their entirety, I synthesized the perspectives, experiences, anecdotes, emotions, and reflections that the participants offered into three broad themes: the saliency of race and socioeconomics at Riverfront; the perceived stigmatization of the Spanish language; and ethnically-biased jokes against Latinos. These collective data informed the nature of the interview protocol for this current study, which I discuss in the next session.
**Individual Interviews**

In-depth individual interviews allow the researcher to utilize open-ended questions to learn rich and detailed information about participant perceptions and understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Moreover, as Maxwell (2012) posited,

To adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population- this is best done by defining the dimensions of variation in the population that are most relevant to your study and systematically selecting individuals or settings that represent the most important possible variations on these dimensions. (p. 98)

In consultation with the Latino Student Coordinator and the Director of Diversity, I invited all Upper School students who identified as Latino to participate in a 45-60 minute individual interview in hopes of further explicating the themes that emerged during the focus group pilot study. The selection process gathered perspectives from diverse backgrounds of Latino students, including family country of origin, race, gender and socioeconomics. In addition to providing additional insights regarding their experiences and perceptions, these interviews also served as an additional source of triangulation. In a similar fashion, I conducted interviews with the Latino Student Coordinator, the Upper Riverfront Director of Diversity, and the faculty advisors of the Upper School Riverfront Latino affinity group to learn more about their interactions and knowledge of the experience of Upper Riverfront Latino students. The rationale was to provide an additional perspective or lens in addition to gleaning more context in understanding the experiences of Latino students.

Similar to the aforementioned measures that the Latino Student Coordinator and I intentionally designed to ensure confidentiality and student psychological safety during
the focus group pilot study, we utilized similar individual interview procedures that encouraged thoughtful and robust student engagement while also mitigating potential stigmatism associated with this process. More specifically, interviews occurred in a discrete area on campus during individual student free periods distributed throughout the school day. I recorded interviews using my iPhone and subsequently sent the recording to Rev a transcription provider. The structure of the analysis and plans for integration of the individual interview transcripts is in the Data Analysis section.

The Latino Student Coordinator and I invited student participation in three primary ways. First, the Latino Student Coordinator extended verbal invitations to students over the course of three Latino Affinity group meetings, in addition to emailing all Latino students. During these communications, she described the nature and purpose of the study, highlighting participation as a unique opportunity to leverage student voice in meaningful ways to improve the social and academic experiences of Latino students at the school.

The second opportunity occurred during the Latino Parent Association picnic. This annual event, held at the beginning of each academic year, convenes all self-identified Latino families to fellowship, break bread, deepen relationships across grades and divisions, and share important annual announcements. As part of the agenda, I presented a brief ten-minute overview of the research project, in English and Spanish, to parents and students, providing the general framework, goals, process, and timetable, outlining potential student engagement participating in focus groups and individual interviews. After the presentation, I spoke with individual students and parents to
address any additional questions and further explain the nature of informed consent, in both Spanish and English. A transcript of those remarks is in the Appendices.

Recognizing the intersectionality of other social identities and the meaningful ways that these intersections inform Upper School Latino students’ understandings of their social and academic experiences at Riverfront, the Latino Student Coordinator and I attempted to maximize both participation and diversity of gender, socioeconomics, race, entry point, and tenure at Riverfront as students indicated interest in participating. To this end, during the first two months of school, the Latino Student Coordinator and I extended personal invitations to Upper School students in hopes of optimizing research participation. These informal invitations occurred extemporaneously throughout the school—at sports events, in the cafeteria, during class, in assembly, and all over the school.

The Latino Student Coordinator arranged meeting times with individual students based on their respective schedules. Depending on student free periods, individual interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes because the typical Riverfront period lasts 50 minutes. In advance of each individual interview, I reiterated that the purpose was to learn more about the students’ experience and that if, at any time, they did not feel comfortable or wanted to stop the interview, I would honor that request. Moreover, as indicated in the assent agreement, I underscored to student participants that their participation would not impact their financial relationship with the school. Finally, I also reminded students that I would maintain their confidentiality during the process by creating individual student codes, to which only I would have access in my home office.
The students signed assent forms acknowledging their understanding the nature of and agreement to participate in the research.

There were forty-three students who self-identified as Latino in the Riverfront Upper School. The sixteen Upper School Latino students who ultimately participated in the study consisted of ten boys and six girls. In terms of grade distribution, there were six freshmen, three sophomores, four juniors, and three seniors. While all students self-identified as Latino, five also racially identified as White, twelve identified as Mexican-American, two as Columbian-American, and three as having one parent of European descent and another parent as either Peruvian, Argentine, or Columbian, respectively. Finally, in terms of entry point to Riverfront, three arrived in Lower School, seven in Middle School, and six in Upper School.

**Interview Protocol Questions**

The interview protocol framework, informed by the focus group pilot study, consisted of the following questions:

- How did you learn about Riverfront?
- When did you arrive at the school?
- What type of school did you attend prior?
- What motivated you to attend the school?
- What do you love most about Riverfront?
- How do you describe Riverfront to your friends and family?
- How would you describe your academic experience thus far?
- And your social experience?
- What is your ethnic background? Where is your family from?
• How would you define “Latino”?
• How do you understand Latino to be defined at Riverfront?
• Do you speak Spanish? If so, do you feel comfortable speaking Spanish at Riverfront?
• Do you think that your ethnic or racial background in any way influences your experience here at Riverfront?
• Do you think that someone’s class/socioeconomic background influences their experience at Riverfront?
• Do you think that gender influences your experience as a Latino?
• Do you feel comfortable speaking about your experience related to class/socioeconomics?
• During the school wide climate assessment, ninety-four percent of students noted having heard jokes of a racial nature at Riverfront. Have you personally heard Latino jokes? What is the nature of these jokes at Riverfront?
• Are you familiar with the Latino Affinity Group? Do you attend? Why or why not?
• What role does the Latino affinity group serve for you personally?
• What suggestions would you recommend to the administration to cultivate greater inclusion for Latino students?

Observations and Field Notes

Observation, the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer, is a critical component of qualitative research (Angrosino, 2007). During the course of collecting data for the research, I observed informal interpersonal
dynamics, conversations, lunchroom groupings, behaviors, advisory groups, assemblies, the Latino student affinity group, and other formal and informal spaces at Riverfront. Forms of observation varied from complete participation, where I engaged in activities in the affinity group to non-participant observer as I viewed dynamics in the cafeteria or listened to conversations around me (Creswell, 2013). The goal of observations allows firsthand experience with participants, while providing an opportunity to note unusual aspects. Observation is equally useful in exploring topics that might prove uncomfortable for participants to discuss (Creswell, 2013). The nature and timing of the observations were fluid and emergent because it was impossible to determine which students might enter a particular area under observation. Moreover, Upper School Riverfront students have autonomy in deciding lunch periods and study hall locations; therefore, I visited these informal spaces according to my consultancy schedule and the students’ schedules.

Field notes reflect the written ethnographic accounts of the observations of a researcher (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Thus, throughout the research process, I noted ongoing observations both in my notebook as well as on my computer in hopes of, as Geertz (1973) characterized, capturing social discourse by writing it down, which transforms a passing event into an account that can be visited multiple times. More specifically, the field notes transform observations of events, persons, and places into words, both on paper and on various digital screens (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Finally, the grounding of field notes is in an interpretive-interactionist understanding of ethnography that posits that: a) ethnographic data and findings are inseparable from the observational process; b) the field researcher should give special attention to indigenous meanings and concerns of those studied; and c) contemporaneously written field notes are
critical in writing more comprehensive and coherent accounts of the lives and concerns of others (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Therefore, the analysis of study field notes served as an additional form of triangulation with other methods to support potential research findings.

**Review of Archival Documents**

Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) posited that archival documents “are another way of establishing multiple perspectives and pulling the central ideas together [to] see the possible continuity between and among them” (p. 206). Therefore, I accessed files from the Director of Admissions and the Latino Student Coordinator to generate initial lists of Latino students based on their ethnic self-identification during the admissions process. Additionally, the Latino Student Coordinator provided a number of documents, including strategic plans, annual reports submitted to a local foundation that provides aid to region-specific educational initiatives, personal and institutional goals, and a disaggregation of Latino students by nationality. Additionally, I consulted Riverfront’s Mission Statement, Vision Statement, Diversity Statement, website, and other school policies that I thought might potentially inform my research. These documents were critical for two principal reasons. First, they provided a deeper sense of the positionality and diverse experiences and perspectives among Latino student participants in this study, which proved incredibly instructive as I began making sense of the data. Secondly, as previously noted, one of the goals was to triangulate data to construct a nuanced and robust understanding. To this end, the documents provided an additional source of information to inform the analysis of the survey and focus group data, which, in turn, strengthened the confidence of the findings.
Research Journal and Memos

Throughout the course of the research, I maintained a journal in which I noted observations, ongoing reflections, conversations, and other relevant dynamics that pertained to developing a broad framework for understanding the context that undergirds the experience of Upper School Riverfront Latino students.

In addition to a journal, Maxwell (2013) asserted that memos were critical for developing ideas because they deepened understanding of a topic, setting, or context. He further advised that the process of writing was akin to thinking on paper. Thus, I further developed and explicated particularly salient observations into memos with the goal of enriching the data process. Maxwell (2013) asserted, “Memos not only capture your analytic thinking about your data, but also facilitates such thinking about your data, stimulating analytic insights” (p.105). Specific memos included: a Researcher Identity Memo, Data Collection Memo, multiple fieldwork memos, member check memos, and analytic memos. All memos are researcher-generated data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis in qualitative research typically consists of preparing and organizing data for analysis, reducing data into themes through coding, condensing the codes, and representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell, 2013). In my capacity as an educational consultant, I have conducted a number of climate assessments in independent schools to evaluate the perceptions and lived experiences of various groups within the community, leveraging Dey’s (1993) assertion that the most effective method to learn qualitative analysis was by actually doing qualitative analysis. Over the course of my tenure executing these assessments, I have developed a personal system of
organization that has proven effective. As advocated by Agar (1980), I began by reading the interview transcripts multiple times to gain a sense of the whole before breaking into parts. Throughout this process, I scribed noteworthy or striking insights, repeated words, and recurring themes into a separate file. Then, I developed codes by aggregating the text into smaller categories to identify emergent, recurring, and divergent themes (Creswell, 2013), allowing the data to curate a compelling narrative of the most salient themes.

I also leveraged Czarniawska’s (2004) deconstructionist framework during the analysis process, which focused on issues of desire and power. These strategies included: examining silences; attending to disruptions and contradictions; and paying attention to outlier perspectives (as cited in Creswell, 2013).

Finally, I synthesized themes, integrating data from observations, memos, archival review of documents, and my theoretical and conceptual framework to generate a comprehensive written analysis detailing my initial findings. Upon completion, I shared these findings with the Latino Student Coordinator, the Director of Diversity and other member of Riverfront’s Upper School Diversity Team as part of the member check process. I incorporated key aspects of their feedback and my learning into the research analysis.

**Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity**

There are numerous definitions of validity in the literature, although Eisner (1991) preferred to discuss the credibility of research as the confluence that breeds credibility and allows confidence about our observations and analyses (as cited in Creswell, 2013). More specifically, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) evaluative criteria defined the notion of
trustworthiness as employing the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This study sought validity by employing the following strategies:

- Triangulation, whereby researchers employ multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Ely et al., 1991; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As previously noted, this study used anonymous surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations, and archival documents to capture a robust sense of the data. I also utilized previously collected data from the pilot study conducted at Riverfront exploring the social and academic experiences of Upper School Latino students. Finally, I integrated my theoretical and conceptual framework as a heuristic strategy to triangulate data.

- Peer review or debriefing provides an external check of the research process (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2013) recommended member checking, whereby the researcher shares the final report with participants to ensure accuracy. Maxwell (2013) defined member checks as a strategy for soliciting information about one’s data from the people under study. He also characterized this strategy as the most critical method for ruling out potentially misinterpreting the meaning of what participants said and did in addition to their perspectives. After an initial analysis of the data, I shared my findings with the Latino Student Coordinator, Director of Diversity, and members of the Diversity Team to elicit feedback.

With regard to my positionality, I have worked in independent schools for the last 18 years in a number of capacities, including classroom teacher and senior administrator.
as Director of Diversity and Inclusion. In this regard, independent school faculty and administrators view me as a fellow colleague who has lived the independent school experience. In my current iteration as an educational consultant, schools hire me specifically for my expertise in the domain of promoting inclusivity and diversity. In this regard, while I currently serve as an external consultant to a number of schools, I develop ongoing relationships with many of the school communities that I support. The aforementioned dynamics render hybrid insider/outsider positionality when I engage with schools. I will engage reflexively with this through creating memos and engaging with critical friends who challenge my positionality and the assumptions it generates.

Likewise at Riverfront, the setting for the current research, I have served as an ongoing resource for a number of years, having provided faculty development, facilitated student workshops, presented parent lectures, and designed and executed a school wide climate survey. In the course of planning my scope of work, I have corresponded with most stakeholder groups, ranging from senior administrators, faculty, and students to parents and board of trustee members. Similarly, while facilitating faculty development opportunities, I have interfaced with the entire faculty and staff. In short, while I am familiar with the community, in many ways I am still perceived as a more neutral objective third party because I have fewer stakes in the outcome, I do not possess supervisory, evaluative, or power of role or authority, and I am situated outside of the formal organizational hierarchy.

Finally, and of particular import for this study, I am also a person of color who has navigated and continues to navigate racialized experiences in the independent school space similar to those experienced by the students. Throughout my tenure at Riverfront, I
have participated in and facilitated a number of diversity-related discussions, forums, and events, on a variety of issues ranging from religion and sexual orientation to socioeconomics and race with many of the student participants. As a result of these experiences, I have cultivated relationships of trust with many of the students, which encouraged their psychological trust to share authentically.

**Summary**

Sixty years after the significant gains yielded by the Civil Rights Movement, which fundamentally shifted notions of racial inclusion and informed subsequent movements around gender and sexual orientation equality, the United States continues to grapple with its inability to manifest its rhetoric around cultivating an equitable society wherein social identity does not inform life chances. This reality has become increasingly evident in recent national, high-profile incidents including the death of a number of unarmed black men by police, the ongoing movement to gain equal rights for the LGBTQ community, discrimination and crimes against the Muslim community, heightened awareness around economic disparities, and the national debate around Latino immigration. Moreover, as noted earlier, the United States population shifted considerably; most noteworthy in the context of this research is the increase of the Latino population. As independent schools deepen their commitment to 21st century academic and social goals, they recognize that the ability to communicate across difference is a critical skill in an increasingly culturally diverse country and world. This aim, coupled with their desire to cultivate school communities that mirror the rich diversity of our society, informed diversity and inclusivity efforts in these spaces. Riverfront, a K-12 independent school located in a metropolitan area in the United States, has a longstanding
commitment to diversity and inclusion and acknowledges that the school needs to engage in specific efforts to improve the social and academic experiences of Latino students in the school. The current research represents a substantive effort to gather data to inform the nature of these interventions, programs, and support.
Chapter 4: Results

This phenomenological qualitative study examined the ways in which Upper School students who self-identified as Latino understood their academic and social experiences at Riverfront, a K-12 independent school with an institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion, located in a metropolitan area in the United States. The primary goals of this study were two-fold: first, the study aimed to provide rich self-reported Latino students’ perceptions regarding their Riverfront experiences to support the school’s ongoing efforts to cultivate an inclusive school environment wherein all students, including Latinos, were able to flourish academically and socially. Secondly, in a broader context, the study should enrich extant literature to provide similar insights to educators and others supporting Latino students in similar school environments.

Ultimately, sixteen Riverfront Upper School Latino students volunteered to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. The Latino Student Coordinator and I apprised students of the opportunity to participate in the research on multiple occasions, including during the Latino Parent Association Picnic and during Latino affinity group meetings. Moreover, recognizing that not all Riverfront Upper School Latino students participated in Latino-themed programming, the Latino Student Coordinator and I also extended informal personal invitations to all students who identified as Latino during the admissions process. The interviews, informed by a previous Riverfront focus group pilot study, varied in length between 45-60 minutes, based on individual student’s availability within a 50-minute class period Riverfront schedule. A number of measures ensured students’ psychological safety and confidentiality, including intentional selection of a discreet meeting place to mitigate potential stigmatism, and reiterating the students’ right
to refuse participation in the research at any time.

The current chapter presents the most salient findings from the research, drawing from an overall qualitative data collection that consisted of: observations; archival review of documents; a focus group pilot study consisting of eight Riverfront Upper School Latino students; and semi-structured interviews with sixteen Riverfront Upper School Latino students, the Latino Student Coordinator, Director of Diversity, and two faculty members that work with the Latino affinity group.

Students who ultimately participated in the study represented various intersectional identities within the Latino diaspora. With regard to gender, ten boys and 6 girls participated in the study out of twenty-five boys and eighteen girls in the entire Upper School. In terms of grade distribution, there were six freshmen, three sophomores, four juniors, and three seniors. While all students self-identified as Latino, five also racially identified as White, while eleven identified as Mexican-American, two as Columbian-American, and three as having one parent of European descent and another parent as either Peruvian, Argentine, or Columbian, respectively. Determining student socioeconomic status in independent schools presents challenges because many schools enforce strict confidentiality in hopes of preserving the dignity and privacy of students and families—even among faculty and school administrators. Notwithstanding, during student interviews, students organically disclosed Riverfront financial assistance status. Of the sixteen Latino students who participated in the study, the ten Latinos who identified as Latino and non-White received financial aid, while the six students who identified as White Latinos did not receive financial aid. Finally, in terms of entry point to Riverfront, three arrived in Lower School, seven in Middle School, and six in Upper
School. The data collection also drew from individual interviews with the Latino Student Coordinator and three faculty members involved with the Latino affinity group.

This chapter presents the most salient findings that emerged from the aforementioned data collection process. The findings are divided into three sections: a) Transitioning to Riverfront; b) Navigating Latino Stereotypes and Microaggressions; and c) Survival.

Section I, Transitioning to Riverfront: Home and School, provides insight into the various ways in which Riverfront Latino students initially reconciled and navigated varying degrees of differences and similarities between their home and pre-Riverfront school communities during their Lower, Middle and Upper school entry points to Riverfront. While students of all backgrounds arguably navigate various forms of acclimation upon entering a new school community, the data suggested that Riverfront Latino students who participated in this research experienced additional transitional stresses due to their Latino ethnic identity. The chapter leverages the primary differentiating lenses that emerged inductively from the focus group pilot study and the subsequent student interviews: ethnicity, race, and socioeconomics.

Section II, Navigating Latino Stereotypes and Microaggressions, enumerates and explicates the nuanced ways in which Riverfront Upper School Latino students described stereotypes and microaggressions encountered during their tenure at Riverfront. While the sixteen Riverfront Latino study participants were similar in their shared sense of Latino identity, they diverged along a number of critical social identities, including gender, race, and socioeconomics. Notwithstanding, all sixteen participants acknowledged numerous instances and shared accounts of negativity framing Latino
identity at Riverfront.

The section details the most frequently cited microaggressions: stigmatization of Spanish Language; Latino jokes and the conflation of all Latinos as Mexican; and the absence of Latino representation in the academic curriculum. Among one of the more salient emergent findings was the heightened awareness of the five students who identified as both White and upper middle class concerning the ways in which their race and social class membership mitigated the frequency and degree to which they were specific targets of Latino stereotypes and microaggressions.

Section III: Survival provides a description of the resources and strategies that Upper School Latino students indicated as supporting their ability to navigate the social and academic challenges at Riverfront, while also maintaining authenticity related to their iterative understanding of their Latino ethnic identity. These resources included the Latino Student Coordinator, ongoing Riverfront outreach efforts to cultivate a critical mass of Latino students, and participation in the Latino affinity group.

Section I: Transitioning to Riverfront: Home and School

The process of transitioning from one’s home or school community to a new school arguably requires a period of acclimation for all students, irrespective of age or social identity. The nature of the transition, however, is differentiated by the degree to which a student’s home or school community is similar to or different from the new school, including norms, routines, culture, and overall climate. Riverfront is a predominately White, academically rigorous, K-12 independent school boasting an annual tuition of approximately $25,000 (Riverfront, 2016). Given the disjuncture between Riverfront’s dominant racial and socioeconomic positionality and the self-
reported Latino ethnic identification of the student participants, fifteen of sixteen of the Riverfront Upper School Latino students reported an ongoing need to reconcile cultural tensions between their home communities and the Riverfront school community. Additionally, ten student participants noted socioeconomic transitional challenges. The one student who did not report cultural transitional issues entered Riverfront in preschool and identified as White Latino.

Given Riverfront’s rigorous admission standards, all Latino participants are incredibly proficient in the English Language, irrespective of their bilingual status. Notwithstanding, the findings suggested differentiation of linguistic sense of belonging at Riverfront related to the degree to which students used Spanish as their primary language at home. For instance, those students who primarily spoke Spanish at home were more likely to report perceptions that they could not manifest their full authentic selves, including Spanish language, to others at Riverfront. Finally, those students who identified as non-White and reported belonging to a lower socioeconomic group relative to their Riverfront classmates noted additional challenges along both racial and socioeconomic lines.

The subsequent sections further explicate ways in which Riverfront Upper School Latino students reported the nature of the specific home and cultural differences they navigated during their initial transition to Riverfront during lower, middle, and upper school.

*Riverfront pre-school and lower school.* Three of the sixteen students entered Riverfront during pre-school and lower school. All three students identified as Latino with two of the three students also identifying as White. These White Latinos, based on
unsolicited information offered during their respective interviews, did not receive financial assistance to attend Riverfront. When inquired about their initial transition to Riverfront, none of the three articulated particular incidences where they perceived specific challenges due to their Latino identity. In terms of previous schools, one began at Riverfront, one transitioned from another élite independent school, and the third student transferred from a highly selective public school.

In describing her transition to Riverfront, a current junior was particularly effusive in sharing her initial positive fourth-grade impressions:

I was the only girl that came in with two other boys. I felt really welcomed. There were tons of kids who reached out and were like, “Oh, do you want to sit with us at lunch?” So I never felt left out of place or odd. (F6, 2017)

The Riverfront Lower School comprises Pre-K through fifth grades with average class sizes between 12-15 students. Smaller class size fosters a sense of an intimate community wherein all teachers and fellow classmates know students as individuals.

Additionally, the Lower School curriculum integrates social emotional learning and responsive classroom techniques intentionally to cultivate strong relationships between and among students. That said, Riverfront’s Lower School student population is also fairly homogenous in terms of racial, ethnic, and social economic background because the majority of the students are children of alumni or friends and family of this network. Similar to many independent schools, Riverfront leverages an admissions fiscal model that prioritizes intentional outreach and financial assistance commencing in middle and upper schools. Therefore, it is not surprising that, while none of the students recalled explicit Lower School transitional challenges, each was also the only Latino student in his or her respective class. Moreover, these same three students reported experiencing
microaggressions later during their middle and upper school experience with a majority of the same lower school classmates.

In short, the overall initial experiences of the three Latino students who entered Riverfront during pre-school or lower school was characterized as fairly positive without enduring recollections of exclusion or differential experiences based on ethnic identity. It is worth noting, however, that their personal journeys in their Latino racial identity formation mitigated these students’ recollections of their Riverfront lower school experience, which Chapter 5 will explore further.

Riverfront Middle School. Riverfront Middle School begins in fifth grade and terminates in eighth grade, which yields two typical entry points for new students—one in fifth grade and a subsequent opportunity in seventh grade. These entry points allow Riverfront to integrate new students from other independent schools as well as public, charter, and parochial schools. The entry points also yield demographic shifts, which typically translate into increased racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, relative to Riverfront Lower School.

Among the sixth Upper School students who participated in the research, six entered Riverfront during middle school: two in fifth grade, three in sixth grade, and one in eighth grade. In terms of previous schools, two attended independent schools prior to Riverfront and four attended public schools. Equally notable, none of the Riverfront Latino students who transitioned to Riverfront during middle school from a public school was aware of the existence of independent schools before his or her respective high-performing public schools provided information about and assistance to navigate the independent school admissions process.
All six students shared similar accounts of their initial attraction to Riverfront informed by the school’s reputation for offering a rigorous academic program.

Recollecting his initial Riverfront academic impressions, a current junior noted:

When I was going to the camp XXXXX, most of the kids were, I guess, counselors—volunteers to help out the adults in the camp—were actually Riverfront students. And I know that the school was really for intelligent people. People with manners. And I also just was looking for a challenging school. And I know that it was hard to get into, but that’s all I really knew. (M2, 2016)

Each of the Latino participants revered Riverfront’s longstanding reputation for academic and athletic excellence, as demonstrated by its impressive college acceptance list and strong athletic teams. As a whole, however, this cohort’s robust and vivid Middle School recollections around cultural tensions contrasted starkly with the accounts provided by the three Latino students who entered in the Lower School. Irrespective of variance around race, previous school type, gender and socioeconomics, all six students reported challenging transitions related to their Latino ethnic identity. Also, each of the six Latino students who entered Riverfront during Middle School offered similar accounts, distinguishing typical developmentally informed school transition challenges from those challenges particular to one’s ethnic identity. For instance, a young man who entered Riverfront during sixth grade explained:

I think Middle School was an interesting transition for everyone at Riverfront because we’d all been subject to the caring, loving, elementary school teachers, who treated you like—not like their own children. But what the Middle School teachers were—the Middle School teachers were more of, “We’ve got to do this, this and this. We’ve got to get this learned by the end of the year, if we focus on all our studies.” It was a little harder to get a relationship with some of the teachers, just because you had a lot more schoolwork, spending a lot of time on homework. (M7, 2016)

Indeed, the students expected various forms of academic acclimation as they
transitioned from their respective schools to Riverfront. They also expected, although uncertain to what degree or the nature of the challenge, reconciling transitioning from schools with fairly large Latino or student of color populations to Riverfront, a predominately White school. Reflecting on his sixth-grade impressions of the predominately White Riverfront students and teachers, a graduating senior noted:

First impressions were obviously there were so many white people. I’ve never seen this many White people before! (M10, 2016)

In similar fashion, a current sophomore reflected on observations and apprehensions she experienced during her initial entry point in sixth grade, while also underscoring the ways in which speaking Spanish was, and still remains, critical to her identity:

The first year, it was very difficult because there weren’t a lot of Latino or Hispanic students. There was a couple, but there weren’t many that I could actually talk to. I remember I didn't really like it in the first couple of weeks because I was like, “there’s nobody there what looks like me, or that talks Spanish, or that I can at least try to be friends with.” A lot of people already had their friend groups. (F2, 2017)

Similar to this student, all Upper School Latino students who entered Riverfront during Middle School noted the paucity of Latino students informed a perception that Riverfront represented an environment where they were unable to speak Spanish as they did at home and at their previous schools. These perceptions were not purely theorized or speculated without foundation; students concluded the stigmatization of the Spanish language based on numerous incidences they experienced or witnessed throughout their tenure. The subsequent section that explores microaggressions describes these incidences in detail.

The predominately White Riverfront Middle School environment was equally
startling for those students who identified as White Latinos. One such student who entered Middle School from an equally regarded independent school noted:

It didn’t really hit me at first, but then I thought it’s really different. I’m just so much different now being exposed to majority white people. I think that really shifted me from the XXXXXXX standpoint. At my old school there’s people from different parts of the world. They had cultural fests; they had parades dressing like your native costume. For the Chinese New Year, all they get [at Riverfront] is a table in front of the lunchroom here. That’s really weird, now that I think about it. (F5, 2016)

The transitional challenges were equally layered for those students transitioning from schools where acknowledgement and celebration of various ethnicities and cultures were part of their previous school’s culture. These challenges were further exacerbated when coupled with socioeconomic differences. The accounts of Latino students who entered Riverfront during Middle School depicted a paradigm wherein the overwhelming majority of the students transitioned from Lower School environments that were comprised of majority Latino or student of color populations to a predominately affluent White school.

A graduating senior identified specific challenges he experienced in Middle School, particularly at the intersection of socioeconomics and ethnicity:

Middle School students are immature, especially students from here [Riverfront] or the XXXX area, who aren’t exposed to people of different cultures, different realities from theirs, who don't actually have to worry about the money their parents bring into the household and what’s going on outside their house and violence and things like that. They're not as sensitive on these things. I guess that’s where that. If they don't know something, they make fun of it. (M9, 2016)

Similar to this senior, a number of the Middle School recruited Latino students came from families where sufficient economic resources to cover basic living expenses was not always a given. Additional challenges existed around immigration; transportation to and from work; working 12-sixteen hour days in low-wage occupations; securing
transportation for their children to and from school, often without a car; varying degrees of English proficiency to navigate school and advocate on behalf of their children; and lack of knowledge regarding public or independent schools in the United States because they were educated in another country. These socioeconomic challenges intersected with issues informed by Latino identity at the school in meaningful ways, which some Riverfront Latino students had to navigate.

Regarding Latino culture, all six Latino students characterized their home cultures as representative of and deeply embedded in Latino culture. This seamless and effortless congruence of home and school culture was an aspect of their lives they had not considered prior to arriving to Riverfront, where the legitimacy of Latino identity was marginalized. Moreover, each of the six students, including those from predominately White school environments, perceived that they were able to manifest their Latino ethnicity freely in their previous lower schools in ways that they perceived Riverfront stifled. Student participants articulated these manifestations as the ability to speak Spanish, share Latino cultural references, and otherwise engage in Latino-themed conversations. Finally, the students were initially struck by and navigated ongoing implications of the lack of Latino presence at Riverfront, both in the student and faculty populations. The Middle School Latino students’ initial entry point experiences contrasted considerably with those students who entered Riverfront during lower school. Chapter 5 explores potential hypotheses informing this differential of experiences.

**Riverfront Upper School.** Ninth grade represents the most robust entry point in Riverfront’s K-12 admissions framework—even more robust than the initial Pre-K and Kindergarten classes. The magnitude of the ninth grade cohort is attributable to a number
of similar Middle School entry point factors, the most salient of which is the desire of students from other independent, public, charter, and parochial schools to transfer to Riverfront for academic, athletic, or social reasons. Riverfront boasts rigorous academics and impressive college acceptances, consistently performs well in regional and state athletic competitions, and is one of the largest independent schools in the area, which provides numerous social opportunities.

An additional factor informing Riverfront’s robust ninth grade cohort involved the majority of student advocacy programs with whom Riverfront partnered, including a regional foundation that provided a substantial recurring gift to underwrite financial assistance for students of color, recruited students to apply to Riverfront during the ninth grade. The rationale for this approach was that investing in a four-year financial aid model provided a greater scale of access for more students than investing in a thirteen-year commitment for fewer students beginning in Kindergarten. The impact for Riverfront Latino students was that, while still overwhelming White, the Riverfront Upper School was significantly more racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse than were the lower and middle schools.

Six Latino students entered Riverfront in the Upper School, all transitioning from the same middle school, a high-performing charter school located in a predominately Latino and lower SES community. All six students identified as Latino, specifically with heritage from Mexico. None of the students identified as White, and all received considerable financial support to attend the school. Finally, all six students who entered Riverfront in ninth grade utilized the Riverfront-sponsored shuttle as their primary mode of transport to and from school. The shuttle picked up students in the morning at the last
train stop closest to the school and returned students to the same location after classes.

Recognizing that the location of the school was only accessible by car, Riverfront instituted the shuttle a number of years ago as an intentional strategy to level the playing field.

By their own accounts, all six students experienced incredibly challenging transitions in ninth grade, acclimating from a 100% student of color, largely Latino charter school to a predominately White upper school. Reflecting on the ethnic composition of his previous middle school as it related to his initial transition to Riverfront, a male student noted:

It was a very good school. I learned a lot there, and I made a lot of friends. It felt good because I never thought about it back then, but now that I look back at it, I see that it was good to have people of my background. Everyone was usually Mexican or Hispanic, and it was, now that I think about it, it was good to be like the majority. (M4, 2016)

As evidenced by the Upper School Latino students’ accounts, the awareness of the critical importance of representation and learning in a community with people who shared one’s identity triggered the racial/ethnic differential between their former school environments and Riverfront. In a similar fashion, sharing initial impressions about his prospective student visit when he realized that he was one of few Hispanics at Riverfront, a freshman remarked:

The first time I came was like last November. It was like a shadow day. Felt kind of awkward because I didn’t know anybody and I was like the only Hispanic kid at the school. (M8, 2016)

Yet another young man shared that he maintained a similar impression of Riverfront well into his first semester of his freshman year, noting:

It kind of takes a while to get used to not seeing as many permanent faces, since
I’m kind of used to seeing mostly Hispanic people, and it’s hard telling the difference between different [White] people here at times. One day I was walking down the hallway and I was just like, “Wow, there are so many blond people in this hallway!” (M1, 2016)

At some point during the first months of acclimation, all six students shared similar perceptions of feeling compelled to choose between authenticity to their ethnic identity or fitting into Riverfront, which they understood as ostensibly leaving their culture at Riverfront’s gate. As a young Mexican-American student characterized her assimilation process:

I don’t want my culture to be taken away from me, and I don’t want to have to take it away myself. Coming here, not many people know about our cultures. That’s why sometimes their assumptions could offend everyone else. I think it would be better to keep my culture in order to help others learn. Know what’s going on around different minorities, besides their ethnicity or race. (F1, 2016)

All six Latino students who entered in ninth grade shared similar impressions and challenges reconciling integration and assimilation models. They also framed their perceptions with an understanding that the majority of their White classmates had experienced little or no contact with Latino students and had not personally experienced the challenges of being part of a racial minority.

Specifically explicating the nature of these challenges at Riverfront, another young Latina student from this cohort shared her initial dichotomous thinking upon arriving to Riverfront: either remain true to her Latino culture or assimilate successfully to Riverfront. She also addressed the challenges of biculturalism, whereby students must discover, navigate, and manage different, and often mutually-exclusive, cultural norms between home and school in ways that White students in a predominately White institutions do not have to do. Speaking specifically to the challenges and pressures of
navigating home and school cultures as a Latino student, she noted:

   My friends [back home] were like, “You’re dressing like them, and you’re speaking like them. You never have time for me.” I noticed, too, that I tried to fit in a lot. I did change. After a while I realized, I was like, “I don’t need to do that.” (F1, 2016)

   This student was not alone in her ability to articulate the specific ways in which she intentionally modified her fashion, way of speaking, word choice, and television viewing patterns in an attempt to integrate into the Riverfront community. Indeed, this additional skill of navigating two worlds—the student’s home culture and the dominant culture of the school—has also been noted by Black students attending predominately White schools (Tatum, 2003). Similarly, Upper school Latino students who entered Riverfront in 9th grade described dressing in a more preppy manner, saving money to purchase Sperry’s, for example, a type of shoe worn by Riverfront boys, changing their speech patterns, eating different foods, and cultivating an interest in lacrosse, tennis, and fencing. In these ways, Latino students hoped to facilitate their integration into Riverfront without distancing themselves from their home community.

   Further explicating specifics at the intersection of Latina identity and Riverdale girl fashion, three Latina students identified specific ways in which gender informed their thinking around integration strategies:

   Most of the way girls dress here is totally different from what other Latina girls from my old school dressed. I do not dress like them all the time. They wear like skinny jeans, and wear all like flowy shirts, and necklaces, and rings, and bracelet. I guess I kind of changed a little bit, the way I dress. I try to dress like them, but at the same time, I also try to kind of keep what I like into it, not just what they like to wear. (F2, 2016)

   A number of the Upper School Latino students noted similar frustrations, sensing that social inclusion at Riverfront required relinquishing or, at the very least, repressing
aspects of their Latino heritage in hopes of assimilating. They framed their frustration as a lose-lose proposition, whereby the process of assimilation, intentional or unintentional, as noted by the student above, entailed potentially alienating one’s home community. Based on the accounts of the Latino students that participated in this research, however, irrespective of their efforts to assimilate, as articulated by this freshman, Latino identity remained negatively perceived.

I think being Latino is viewed as something negative, but it’s not something negative that will completely affect my emotions or anything. I think it’s mainly because they might not even know any better than that. I can’t blame them. They’ve lived here their whole lives in a closed community, with just these people. They might not have interacted with that many Hispanics or Latinos. Maybe that integration of the school would probably be the best remedy for the lack of . . . don’t know, understanding. (M6, 2016)

In the final analysis, the perspectives offered by the sixteen Upper School Riverfront students who self-identified as Latino offered compelling accounts regarding the ways in which they perceived the mediation of their initial Riverfront transition was by their Latino ethnic identity. Prior to arriving to Riverfront, the overwhelming majority of the student participants experienced alignment of home and school culture related to the ability to manifest their Latino ethnicity. In both domains, students indicated that they were able to speak Spanish, manifest Latino cultural references, and dress, speak, and behave in Latino-informed manners without sensing potential stigmatism or undermining their sense of belonging.

Irrespective of race or developmental entry point—Lower School, Middle School, or Upper School—each of the Latino student participants indicated an awareness of the presence, or lack thereof, of other students who shared their Latino identity. Moreover, those students who transitioned in Middle and Upper Schools repeatedly underscored the
importance of Latino representation in supporting their sense of belonging. Finally, while ongoing recruiting efforts and financial support from student advocacy and philanthropic organizations steadily increases the number of Latino students at Riverfront, current fiscal models prioritizes concentration of new Latino students in the Upper School, which yields an environment in which Latino student representation in the Lower and Middle Schools is often limited to one or two Latino students per class. While Upper School Latino student numbers are greater relative to other divisions, Latino students are nonetheless dispersed among an overall student population, which often results in students feeling isolated and disconnected from other Latinos during classes and other school activities. The subsequent section, Navigating Latino Stereotypes and Microaggressions, provides greater specificity regarding the nature of the stereotypes and microaggressions that Latino students navigated at Riverfront.

Section II: Navigating Latino Stereotypes and Microaggressions

Building on the previous section that explored the challenges that Latino Upper School students described in navigating their Latino ethnicity at Riverfront during their respective entry points in Lower, Middle and Upper Schools, this section presents their views on the nature of and ways in which these challenges manifested.

Irrespective of race, socioeconomic status, gender, or entry point, each of the sixteen Upper School Latino students acknowledged the existence of pervasive Latino stereotypes at Riverfront. Moreover, the students provided key insights regarding the nature and frequency of microaggressions they encountered during their Riverfront tenure. This chapter section contains subsections, reflecting the most frequently cited stereotypes and microaggressions: stigmatization of Spanish Language; Latino jokes and
the conflation of Latinos as Mexicans; and the exclusion of Latinos from the academic curriculum.

_Sigmatization of Spanish language._ The participants unanimously agreed that the Spanish language was not valued at Riverfront. Although all sixteen students indicated possessing varying degrees of Spanish linguistic fluency, they concurred that they often intentionally avoided speaking Spanish in public spaces at Riverfront because of the negative social consequences they endured over the course of their tenure at Riverfront. As a 9th grade Latino of Mexican descent noted, in reference to perceptions around speaking Spanish:

> I mean, sometimes when I’ll call my mom on the phone, I’ll speak Spanish to her. Everyone around me would just be like, “What are you doing? Why don’t you just speak in English to your mother? Doesn’t she understand?” I’ll be, “Yeah, she understands English. But she wants me to practice my Spanish. “They’ll be like, “Well, I mean, you live here. Why would you want to practice your Spanish?” I’m like, “Because that’s how I was raised. I mean that’s just how I was taught.” (Focus Group, 2015)

All sixteen Upper School Latino students who participated in the study shared the perception that Riverfront did not value Spanish equally to English. Many offered powerful instances wherein Riverfront students—always White, and never of color—made fun of or belittled them when they spoke in Spanish in school with other Latino students or when they spoke with family members on the phone. A current senior provided an additional instance of explicit messaging from his classmates that Spanish was either inferior to English or not welcome at Riverfront:

> I guess, for me, even a little bit, when I talk in Spanish with XXX on the soccer field, even sometimes, people will just be like, “Why are you guys talking in Spanish? Speak English!” You’re just like, “I don’t understand why I have to do that, because we both speak Spanish, and if we want to say something secret so that the other team doesn’t understand what we’re saying, because obviously they

77
won’t speak Spanish either, then we’re going to do that.” Talking in Spanish with XXXX is just also . . . I feel comfortable doing it. It just feels a little normal, I guess. We can still talk in English, but talking in Spanish is still just something that we both can relate on, so that’s something that we do. (M7, 2016)

This account is fairly explicit regarding the critical way in which Latino students regard speaking Spanish as a natural expression of their identity. The account is equally demonstrative in providing a concrete and equally explicit way in which Riverfront students communicated to Latino students that Spanish was marginalized and not welcome at school.

Likewise, a current freshman shared similar experiences of stigmatization of the Spanish language that she encountered in Riverfront classes:

People are like, “Oh my God. You speak Spanish? Get it together!” Then we’ll have a conversation. Or in physics, we’re usually lab partners, so we’ll be talking in Spanish while doing the lab, and people go like, “How do you guys do that? Can you all just speak English?” Sometimes they’re like, “You don’t need to speak Spanish!” It’s just how we feel comfortable. It’s natural to us. (F2, 2016)

Each of the Upper School Latino students indicated that speaking Spanish is critical to their sense of identity and belonging. However, ongoing incidents convey an unequivocal message to Latino students that speaking Spanish at Riverfront has the potential of undermining their social inclusion at the School. Moreover, as exemplified by the previously referenced incident on the soccer field, the potential stigmatism of communicating in Spanish is not limited to interactions with non-Latinos, as students are also stigmatized even when communication is confined between and among Latino students. The exception to this rule, the students described, occurs when non-Latino students require help with Spanish homework assignments.
Similar to most independent schools, Riverfront offers Spanish language instruction as part of its World Languages curriculum. Riverfront also offers an annual Service Learning trip to a Spanish-speaking country in Central America, with the hopes of providing an opportunity for students to enact service in addition to providing an authentic experience to enrich Spanish language proficiency. Informed by the insights offered by the Latino participants in this research, these two programs yield additional complications regarding perception of Spanish at the school: 1) Spanish is only intentionally welcomed when Riverfront students require assistance with Spanish homework and; 2) Latino students perceive that students who participate on Riverfront Community Service trips to Latin America often return to Riverfront with a sense of entitlement to indiscriminately use Spanish slurs, which offends Latino students.

Latino participants indicated that while the Spanish language is largely stigmatized at the School, non-Latino Riverfront students actively seek out Latino students when they require assistance with Spanish homework—particularly students enrolled in upper-level Spanish classes that require mastery of advanced grammar, essay writing and demonstration of speaking skills. When asked if he speaks Spanish at Riverfront, a current senior who has attended Riverfront since Lower School responded quite simply,

I only speak Spanish when someone asks me for help with Spanish homework (M5, 2016).

Another senior offered a similar reflection regarding the nature of speaking Spanish at Riverfront:

Usually the extent of my Spanish with my friends that do not speak Spanish is to help them translate for Spanish class. (M7, 2016)
The non-verbal communication that I observed during student interviews—ranging from looks and audible sighs of frustration, desperation, and indignation—suggested that the irony was not lost on Latino students that the same Riverfront population that invalidated the legitimacy of the Spanish language also actively sought Latino students for Spanish assistance in the name of advancing the academic needs of non-Latino students.

The second frustration that Latino students expressed centered on the perceived sense of entitlement of non-Latino Riverdale students that allowed them to use Spanish slurs and swears at Riverfront in spite of Latino students expressing their objections. This was particularly true of those who traveled abroad to Spanish-speaking countries as part of the Riverfront Community Service program. A current junior expressed her concern, almost fighting back tears:

I remember earlier this year there was a freshman boy who was going around saying derogatory remarks in Spanish to the Latino students. So we told him that should not be happening. Bad words like “pendejo.” They would go around like, “Hey, pendejo, hey puto, hey puta.” And I think that’s . . . I love the exchange programs because you get to travel the world, but at the same time the people who go on those exchange programs come back with a sense of entitlement. “Oh, I visited that country, I’m allowed to use those remarks.” No, you’re not. I know of others who do the same thing and they’ve gone on exchange programs. They’ve heard of these words. They’re not taught here, but they’ve heard these words because they go on those exchange programs. They come back with a sense of entitlement, like, “Oh, I went to Argentina, I’m practically Latino now. Like I can say all these words.” (F6, 2016)

Likewise, a graduating senior provided additional context regarding the ways in which Latino students understood the negative impact of the community service trips in informing a single negative monolithic narrative around the Latino experience:

That’s mostly because of the Guatemalan exchange group that we do where we have students go down to Guatemala and build houses for a summer. I still
haven’t been down to the campus down there in a while. I’m not sure if the
tables are still there, since we get our coffee there for like all of Riverfront.
They put the farmer’s pictures on there. There’s just all old Guatemalan men on
the . . . They’re huge pictures on the windows of the campus center. I think that’s
the mentality students come away with—that it’s like dark, short men with really,
really tan skin. (M10, 2016)

All sixteen Upper School Latino students participating in the research reported
specific incidences routinely encountered at Riverfront that informed their understanding
of the second-class citizen status of the Spanish language. These experiences included
explicit remarks denigrating the Spanish language from classmates on the soccer field, in
academic classes, or during conversations between and among Latino students. This
frustrating dynamic was further exacerbated by the use of slurs and swears by non-Latino
students who attended Riverfront’s study abroad program while fully aware of Latino
students’ objections, and Riverfront’s non-Latino students who leveraged Latino
students’ knowledge of Spanish to assist them with their Spanish homework.

**Latino jokes and conflation of Latino ethnicity as Mexican.** The current study
draws from initial quantitative data provided by a Riverfront Upper School Climate
Survey in which 94% of the general Upper School student population reported having
heard jokes of a racial nature at Riverfront. During the subsequent focus group pilot study
consisting of eight Upper School Latino students, each of the eight students reported
having heard both generalized racial jokes and specific jokes regarding Latinos and noted
the nature of the jokes and the context in which they existed. An 11th grade girl of
Mexican descent described:

But there’s one time I was sitting in the academic building. There was a group of
friends right next to me. They were talking about one of them got a new car or
something. Then, one was like, “Oh, yeah, you can fit like ten Mexicans in it.” I
was like, OK!” There was laughter. I think they noticed I was there. They just
quieted down really fast. (Focus Group, 2015)
Another student, of Puerto Rican and Portuguese descent, offered a joke of a similar nature:

I have a similar one. I just got a new car. Or, well, not new, but my Dad gave our old purple minivan. It’s a nice, big purple minivan. The second day I drove it to school, and brought it around to the back field to practice, someone was like, “Is that how you brought XXXX and XXXX to America?” I was like . . . (Focus Group, 2015)

These two accounts describing the nature and context of Latino jokes were illustrative for a number of reasons, the most salient of which was the sharing of the jokes openly in the presence of Latinos, which addressed the pervasive nature of Latino jokes and the ways in which the Riverfront environment condoned them. If the jokes were frowned upon by the community, students would share the jokes more covertly, not in public, and certainly not in the presence of Latinos.

In the current study, each of the sixteen Upper School students acknowledged having heard Latino jokes frequently during their Riverfront Upper School experience. This observation was consistent across intersecting identities—gender, race, socioeconomics and entry point. Of particular note, however, was the acknowledgement of those Latino students who also identified as White that their Whiteness mitigated the frequency with which jokes were told in their presence.

A current senior, who identified as both Latino and White, shared his frustration in navigating Latino jokes and long term friendships with classmates that he has known since Lower School:

Well, something that comes up with me a lot is that it’s just the joking side of it. If someone finds out I’m Colombian, they just crack some jokes like, “Do you have any cocaine?” Sometimes people will just say like “taco” at me. I don’t know what that has to do with it. Those people, some of them I consider friends and it’s just something that they think. I don’t really let it have an effect on me, but it could to someone other than me. Even if it’s someone overhearing a conversation,
it’s something that’s treated with levity. But if it someone’s heritage is a serious thing, than these jokes aren’t the best things to be making. (M5, 2016)

This student’s description of his experience continued the pattern of recurring themes that were also present in previously cited jokes—references to Mexicans and tacos, illegal activities, most often drug use, and poverty. Of particular note from the White Columbian was that fact that the jokes typically began once people found out he was Latino. In other words, his Latino ethnicity was not always readily discernable to Riverfront students because they generally equated Latino with stereotypical indigenous Mexican features, which was antithetical to their understandings of White. This resulted in White Latinos, similar to this Columbian student, having the ability to decide if and to what degree they would share their Latino heritage.

Another senior shared similar jokes he heard throughout his tenure at Riverfront:

Around some friends, they’re not very serious obviously, but aimed towards me. They’ll be a lot of [Mexican] border references. If they hear a joke about or hear any sort of “taco,” they’ll be like, “XXXXX, [that’s] you” and I’ll be like “no.” That was, sort of just, not really bothering me. There definitely are jokes (M9, 2016)

Similarly, a current senior who entered Riverfront during Middle School shared his experience of the jokes beginning upon his arrival in sixth grade.

From the start of sixth grade, students would say kind of racist jokes like, “Lazy tacos. You like quesadillas. Your parents hopped the border.” Things like that. They would see it online or hear it from older siblings, so they thought it was ok to say things like that. Just like shows, like Family Guy. Like, culturally insensitive shows. I guess it’s not ok to make fun of it, but watching shows like South Park, Family Guy, Futurama, they find that it’s ok. I guess for them socially, they thought its better to crack jokes and stuff like that. One thing that really bothered me that carried through was a couple of them made a jingle with my name: XXXXXXXXXXXX, quesadilla, add some chicken and some cheese, XXXXXXXX, quesadilla. (M10, 2016)
The microaggressive racially informed Latino jokes described were not isolated to this student. Another current junior recounted her Lower and Middle School experiences with stereotypes and microaggressions at Riverfront.

There are definitely assumptions and stereotypes. I don’t know if it’s just in my grade, but I personally have had a lot of issues with bullying and racial bullying, especially in the Middle School. I remember one day when I was in the fifth grade and we would get dropped off in the Middle School. So I would walk with my brother up the steps to the Elementary School.

I remember one day we were walking by the bathroom and one of the custodial ladies was cleaning. A boy said, “That’s going to be their future job. That’s what they’re going to be doing in the future.” The boy was in middle school and in my grade. He said it behind my back so that I wouldn’t hear it. But then it floated everywhere and then I heard of it because one of my friends let me know.

I remember jokes that were being made in Elementary School [at Riverfront]. I think people do it behind my back but they won’t say it directly to my face because they know that I’m not going to tolerate that if you say it in front of me. Jokes like, “Oh, Mexicans only do construction, they only serve to do physical labor, they’re not smart people. I don’t know why she’s here, she’s not smart.” Just derogatory remarks (F6, 2016).

A recurring theme among the Latino jokes was a cultural reference to *tacos* and *crossing the border*, both informed by a widespread understanding of Latino as synonymous with a narrowly conceived stereotypical understanding of Mexicans—irrespective of a Latino’s country of origin. The jokes challenged the Upper School Latino students because they were often within the context of a meaningful relationship among friends or acquaintances, which increased the social consequences of intervening. Finally, Latino students had difficulty in addressing the Latino jokes because they were framed as jokes, which are ostensibly, by their very nature, entertaining and not meant to hurt anyone.
The framing of Latino as synonymous with all Latinos was further illustrated by a scenario shared by a frustrated senior of Peruvian descent:

I play soccer. Or at least for the school team. My club team is predominately minorities. So any joke that you hear here is going to be illogical from anything you hear here. Here people on the team will say, for example, “Run like running across the border.” I’m not even Mexican. So they are stereotyping me. They also make the joke to the Mexican member on our team. (M7, 2016)

Similarly, describing his experiences with Latino jokes and stereotypes at the school, one freshman explained:

Well, sometimes I hear somebody talking, like in the locker room I heard middle schoolers talking, and they mentioned Mexicans, and then I thought it might be something mean or insulting. Then there’s also people who do say some racist things, like some people told me that one of the guys in my physics class is a Donald Trump supporter, and that he also agrees with kicking out the illegals. And then, well, there was also this incident where this kid said something in Spanish that was just rude to one of my friends that came from XXXX. (M4, 2015)

The thematic patterns among the various Latino jokes experienced by each of the Upper School Latino were consistent. In the former account, the previously indicated recurring themes were all present: regarding Mexicans as the umbrella identity for all Latinos, an extension of this framing by referencing Donald Trump’s rhetoric of Latinos characterized as the abject illegal as the root cause for current economic issues, and a non-Latino using Spanish slurs to target Latino students.

On the other hand, those students who identified as White Latinos, while acknowledging the pervasive nature of Latino jokes at Riverfront, equally conceded that their skin color reduced the frequency and potential impact of the ethnically informed jokes. A current senior noted:

I’d say, I’d just mention that I don’t think I really fit most people’s idea of Latino because I don’t really look like what they think a Latino looks like: darker skin,
darker hair, just like that. Not as light-skinned as I have. I think that’s the image they have just like physically and they’re speaking Spanish. That’s something I think I’ve been sort of lucky with that I haven’t experienced as much . . . As many negative experiences with my culture as some other people have because I don’t really look like what some people think a Latino to be. (M5, 2016)

Sharing her personal experience as a White Latino at Riverfront, a current sophomore added:

I’ve heard so many things about being Latino, like all stereotypes. I look White, but there’s some Latinos that don’t look, they’re not White. They understand that they’re not from here. They, I don’t know, I don’t think they understand exactly that Latino is for them. All they know is that they speak Spanish. Usually, that leads into “Oh, you’re from Mexico.” No, I’m not. Thanks, though. You tried. I don’t think they understand that Latino means all of these countries, and all of these different cultures into one big, kind of umbrella, rather than just American. They have assumptions of illegal immigrants, which is a big thing. I know a couple . . . It was 8th grade. It was ridiculous. This boy, and he’s my friend. I’ve known him since I was five, and his parents are from Colombia. He’s like, “Oh, you’re Mexican.” No. People who don’t know me, yes, they think I’m just White. The people who are my closest friends, they understand that I’m not from here. I was not born here. I am from a different country, and I love my culture and everything that comes with it.

As noted earlier, the ways in which the Riverfront community typically conceived of Latinos was generally a stereotypical caricature of a Mexican, which excluded the possibility of White Latino identity. Those Riverfront Upper School Latino students who identified as White and Latino indicated pride in their Latino ethnicity. When confronted with Latino stereotypes, many of the White Latinos expressed frustration that their classmates did not recognize their Latino ancestry, while also acknowledging the benefits of not having to endure the frequency of Latino jokes and microaggressions as their non-White Latino classmates did.

The Latino students’ accounts also revealed that Riverfront Latino jokes began as early as Lower and Middle Schools and that all students were the recipients of these jokes, irrespective of tenure or entry point at Riverfront, gender, socioeconomic class, or
race. Notwithstanding, the Upper School Latino participants demonstrated a fair degree of variability with regard to their understanding of the impact of these jokes: some understood the jokes as somewhat annoying, yet fairly innocuous, while others found the jokes deeply offensive and culturally insensitive.

These nuanced scenarios were revelatory for a number of reasons. First, they provided concrete examples and themes around which Latino jokes at Riverfront manifested. Indeed, critical to the punch line or effectiveness of the jokes was a general understanding of Latino identity as synonymous with Mexican. Secondly, the jokes revealed a fairly vivid and essentialized characterization of Mexicans—abject immigrant, undereducated, relegated to physical labor, and generally inferior to White Americans. Third, it is noteworthy that the joke delivery was in interracial spaces in the presence of Hispanics. The jokes were not reserved for a homogenous White racial grouping to avoid offending a person from Mexico, negative social repercussions, or potential school punishments. This unfiltered and uncensored dissemination of racially themed jokes in the presence of Hispanics illustrated the degree to which racial jokes, in general, and Hispanic jokes, in particular, were condoned by the larger Riverfront school culture. The final section of this chapter explores the absence of Latino representation in the Riverfront academic curriculum.

**Lack of Latino representation in Riverfront academic curriculum.** In spite of numerous challenges that the Riverfront Upper School Latino students who participated in the study articulated around navigating tensions between their ethnic identity and the general predominately White Riverfront school culture—stigmatization of the Spanish language and conflation of all Latinos as Mexicans, racial microaggressions, and Latino
jokes—each of the sixteen participants deeply respected and valued the rigorous academic experience that Riverfront offered. Particularly for those first-generation Latino-American students who entered Riverfront from public and charter schools or lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Riverfront represented access to success—prestigious colleges, high-wage careers, and all the accoutrements of the American Dream.

As one of the most élite independent schools in the region, the Riverfront admissions process is fiercely competitive, requiring scoring in the top 5% on independent school entrance exams, demonstration of sophisticated writing skills via submission of essays, teacher recommendations, and multiple interviews with Riverfront Admissions staff (Riverfront Archival Data, 2015). The process ensures the preparation of prospective Riverfront students is sufficient for academic success at Riverfront, where intellectual ability and engagement serve as critical currency and are highly valued. While access to rigorous and well-rounded curriculum served as a primary motivating factor for all sixteen Upper School Latino students to attend Riverfront, each also indicated that they rarely engaged with Latino identity within the context of the academic curriculum.

Reflecting on the Latino academic presence during his thirteen years at Riverfront, a White Latino of Columbian descent noted,

It’s not a topic we cover a lot in any world cultures or in geography class. Or history. No, because I always remember we’d be studying some areas and I’d sort of hope that like Columbia would be brought up. In English, I remember one book that was written by a Latino author, *The House on Mango Street*. (M5, 2016)

This Columbian-American student was not alone in his recollection of having read one novel, *The House on Mango Street*, during his entire Riverfront academic career. Similarly, each of the students indicated that they secretly hoped that, at some
point, they would see their ethnic identity represented in the curriculum. Responding to a direct question about whether he had learned about Latinos in an academic context at Riverfront, a junior responded:

Nope. We’ll study White authors, and some Black authors, depending on the topic of the class that we’re going through, but no, not really ever Hispanic or Latino authors (M7, 2016)

The students’ accounts suggested that the integration of The House on Mango Street into the English curriculum was both recent—within the last two years—and not consistent across all English classes. Moreover, while sustained Riverfront diversity initiatives resulted in the integration of at least one Black author, the same could not be said about the Latino presence in the Riverfront curriculum, as noted by a current senior:

Nope. Also, we’re the class where they’re trying new things after us. They’re seeing what’s working and what’s not. I know what they’re changing from what I hear from XXXXX. When she came in 9th grade and I was in 10th grade, they read The House on Mango Street. We didn’t do that. They read another book about, it was more talking more about Black History. It was like far more back, like 1800s. (M10, 2016)

Indeed, each of the sixteen Latino students indicated having never seen himself or herself reflected in the Riverfront curriculum with the exception of some students having read The House on Mango Street in some of the English classes. They did not learn about the accomplishments of Latino scientists or mathematicians, Latino artists or musicians, or Latino history. A number of the students also noted that often coupled with the lack of representation was a sense of hyper-visibility the few times that Latino identity was peripherally referenced in classes. A current junior highlighted this irony sharing,

Not at all. I remember, I feel like maybe we touched the subject once or twice. I remember in history specifically the teacher would say Latino/Hispanic and then he would kind of glance over at me like “Oh, this is you!” I don’t think they really
know the difference. I had one of my teachers ask me the other day, “What is the difference between Latino and Hispanic. What is the correct term to use?” (F6, 2016)

This final overwhelming consensus among the Riverfront Upper School Latino students suggested that they rarely saw their ethnic identity reflected in the curriculum, particularly in English and history courses, where the students articulated an expectation to learn about the history, contributions, and presence of Latinos. While the integration of *The House on Mango Street* potentially reflected an awareness or intentionality on the part of some English teachers, this was not consistent across grades and teachers based on the accounts provided by student participants. In the domain of history, only one student could recall a specific instance that referenced Latino history. Notwithstanding, her recollection was coupled with a sense of hyper-visibility because she felt the teacher singled her out during the lesson because of her Latino heritage.

Section II explored the specific Latino stereotypes and microaggressions that the sixteen Riverfront Latino Upper School students described encountering during their tenure. While the students represented considerable diversity relative to gender, socioeconomics, race, entry point, and tenure, all sixteen encountered similar Latino stereotypes and microaggressions, the most salient of which were explored in this section: stigmatization of Spanish Language, Latino jokes and the conflation of all Latinos as Mexicans, and the absence of Latino representation in the academic curriculum.

Section III, the final section, explores resources and strategies that participants indicated supported their ability to navigate the challenges explored in Section II. These supports included: the Latino Student Coordinator and ongoing Riverfront outreach
efforts to cultivate a critical mass of Latino students, and participation in the Latino affinity group.

Section III: Survival

The sixteen Upper School Latino students that participated in the study shared numerous and ongoing instances in which they perceived that their Latino identity mediated their Riverfront experiences in ways that often undermined their sense of belonging, agency, voice, and sense of inclusion in the academic curriculum. Sections I and II explicated these nuances in detail.

Section III describes the ways in which Latino study participants described supports, resources, and strategies that enabled them to counter dynamics conspiring to threaten their ability fully to engage in and benefit from the Riverfront academic and social experience. These resources include the Latino Student Coordinator and ongoing Riverfront outreach efforts to cultivate a critical mass of Latino students, and participation in the Latino affinity group. The following subsections will provide greater details regarding the nature of these supports.

Latino student coordinator and ongoing efforts to cultivate a critical mass. The genesis of the role of Latino Student Coordinator recognized that the former diversity structure lacked the necessary resources of time and expertise required to be effective regarding Latino student outreach and support. Thus, the primary role of the Coordinator was to leverage and create new networks to cultivate a critical mass of Latino students at Riverfront, and to support Latino students and their families upon arrival. In recent years, the Latino Student Coordinator’s intentionality in cultivating and maintaining relationships with key members of the Latino community and high-achieving public and
charter schools with significant Latino student populations yielded an increase in Latino students, most notably in the Middle and Upper schools. Moreover, the Latino Coordinator created cohorts of students that entered Riverfront together from the same school with the idea of structuring ongoing student support as individuals collectively navigated Riverfront.

During each of the sixteen interviews, Latino Upper School students indicated awareness, as young as Lower School, of the number of other Latino students in their specific classes and grades. For those students in the Lower School, they recalled being either the only Latino student in the grade or one of two or three other Latino students. However, they also noted an increase in Latino students during Middle and Upper School in the previously noted entry points of fifth, seventh, and ninth grades. A current junior reflected on the Latino student presence during her tenure, thusly,

Not that I remember. I know that here was one other Latino in my grade [in Lower School]. He’s not here anymore. He left in Middle School. I think the number stayed the same in Middle School. I think maybe in the grades below me they got a lot more. Because I know XXXX came, and there was XXXX, and XXXX. But I was the only Latino in my grade until eighth grade, which is when XXX came. (F6, 2016)

Given the relatively few numbers of Latino students per class or grade, similar to this junior, Upper School Latino participants were able to name, without much thought, other Latino students in their grade, in the previous grade, a grade older, and offer specifics regarding the Latino student’s previous school, personality, class schedule, sports teams, and other details. As indicated in Section I and Section II, the Riverfront Latino students longed to connect with other Latinos at Riverfront, to speak Spanish, and
otherwise manifest their ethnic identity as they were able to do at their respective previous schools and at home.

Another intriguing finding was that Riverfront Latino upperclassmen—juniors and seniors—were acutely aware that the current underclassmen, particularly the freshmen, had significantly different experiences regarding the nature of their transition, informed by a critical mass of Latinos. As an intentional effort on the part of the Latino Student Coordinator to recognize the ongoing challenges that Latino students shared over the years of being the only one, the current freshman and sophomore classes employed a cohort model of three or four students who transitioned to Riverfront together from the same school. The assumption was that their shared previous school experience, relationships between and among members of the group, and the ability to process as a group would serve as a meaningful resource to support a positive transition. In addition, the majority of these students utilized the shuttle that Riverfront provided to transport low-income students to and from school, which provided time before and after school to bond and process in an affinity group environment of Latino students.

In 2016, for example, four Latino students entered Riverfront from the same high-performing charter school. Previously, two students entered Riverfront from the same charter school. A current junior, who also graduated from the same middle school but entered Riverfront as the only new Latino in his grade served as a mentor for the new Latino students. When asked about the cohort’s transition, he replied:

Well, I know XXXX is . . . I talk to XXXX a lot because I see him at soccer, and he’s very open about what happens to him on a daily basis, so that’s pretty cool. And there’s a kid called XXXXX. He’s more of a funny type. He makes jokes about what he sees. Sometimes he’s making jokes about . . . When he talks about what his culture is he says that some White people just look at like this. They
don’t care. And there’s a girl who came here. Her name is XXXXX. She doesn’t talk a lot, but I see her at soccer sometimes, and she talks about how it’s hard to get all the stuff she needs because for sports here they make you buy a lot of stuff. Overall, they just talk about how they’re doing or if they’ve gone through anything bad, and just ask us how did I deal with it or something (M2, 2016).

In a similar fashion, another upperclassman shared the nature of his mentoring with the members of the current Latino cohort. In his account, he referenced supporting a particular freshman student who requested strategies to navigate reconciling ongoing bullying from a non-Latino student who, over a period of three months, intentionally mispronounced the new Latino freshman’s name,

Specific instances where they’ve come to me—just basic things that people would expect. If they need help with a certain homework assignment or a project they don’t understand, and it’s something that I had to go through, and what I went through. I can kind of help them get an idea of what they should be doing because I know when I was there, I had to do some projects, I was not really well aware of exactly what we were supposed to do, and I never had anyone who I could count on to make sure I was doing things right and not doing them wrong.

If there is someone that’s bothering them or doing something—I don’t care if it’s on purpose or not, but basically if they’re having issues with someone else, being the guy who tells them to be the better man. Don’t be like them and call them something else, too. Do the right thing and tell them who you are. You’re not the other person, and if they’re going to keep calling you the wrong name then they might as well not talk to you at all if they’re not going to get your name right. (M3, 2016)

These accounts offer compelling insight regarding the ways in which intentionally fostering a critical mass supports Latino students in not feeling alone and isolated in a predominately White school environment. Moreover, critical masses provide seemingly organic support from cohort peers also navigating similar experiences. Finally, as the respective cohorts matriculate into the Upper School, critical masses offer opportunities for authentic mentoring from older Latino students who provide insights and concrete
strategies gleaned from having also navigated the Riverfront transition themselves only a few years prior.

All participants who entered Riverfront during the Middle and Upper school noted the importance of the Latino Student Coordinator visiting their respective schools and personally guiding them and their parents through the unfamiliar and daunting independent school process. A current ninth grader recalled:

Mrs. XXXXX actually came to find me because she found out that I was applying. And they were looking for me and my mom to get me to talk about applying for Riverfront because she found out I was applying to private schools. She didn’t find us, but one of the, I guess, teachers or directors. (M2, 2016)

In a similar fashion, another student described ways in which the Latino Student Coordinator served as resource for her and her family during the admissions process.

I learned about Riverfront because my mom got a call from the school. I think it might have been Mrs. XXXX telling them that they wanted me to come here. They were offering me an application, a spot in. I’m pretty sure that she was the one that called my mom. Yeah, and they were like, “Oh, you should try to apply, and do all the tests, the interview, and then the SSAT [Secondary School Admissions Test].” That’s basically how I did it, and I got in (F2, 2016)

The majority of the Latino students that entered during Middle and Upper school were intentionally recruited, in large part, due to the efforts of the Latino Student Coordinator. Not only did she extend the Riverfront admissions network beyond the schools with which the school had maintained longstanding relationships, many of which did not have Latino students, the Latino Student Coordinator also personally shepherded Latino families, in English and Spanish, through an unfamiliar process. This assistance included providing context about independent school and Riverfront culture, navigating families through testing procedures, managing anxieties and expectations, subsidizing test fees, translating documents, and serving as a liaison between Riverfront Admissions
staff and families while advocating on behalf of students. In short, the ongoing efforts of
the Latino Coordinator began to cultivate a deeper Latino presence at Riverfront.

Notwithstanding, while the Latino Student Coordinator made noteworthy strides
in increasing the number of Latino students, the current structure is ineffective and
undermines her ability to provide adequate support for Latino students once they become
part of the community. Currently, the Latino Student Coordinator teaches three Spanish
classes, in addition to supervising a school wide resource that often requires attending
multiple after school events each week in addition to coordinating and training students
engaged in the service as well. Also, students from this service use the Latino Student
Coordinator’s office as a place to congregate, store equipment, and discuss coordination
of logistics, which results in Latino students not being able to utilize the space during
their multiple and staggered free periods.

While still admiring the Latino Student Coordinator for her efforts to facilitate the
admissions process, Latino students expressed not having a safe place on campus similar
to other students of color who congregated in the office of their respective faculty
advisors. For instance, the Black and Asian students used the Director of Diversity’s
office to create critical mass and support other Black and Asian students. Moreover,
Upper School Latino students who participated in the survey perceived that the Latino
Coordinator’s primary concern was supervision and coordination of the school wide
service, then her Spanish language students, and finally the Latino students.

This sentiment was encapsulated by a student who very much admired the Latino
Student Coordinator, but nonetheless felt unsupported,
She’s never around. You go and try to talk to her about something, out the door, on her computer doing something with the XXXXXX or her Spanish students are coming in to ask her questions. Then they keep coming asking questions, “Can we do this? Can we do that?” You can’t have someone who is that unavailable like how, it’s not your fault, you can send her an email, she won’t respond. Oh, she might respond.

It’s more infuriating, and I understand that it’s got to be tough for the underclassmen because I know that they’re coming kind of out of the same situation where their parents aren’t involved. Their parents can’t because they can’t really set aside time to focus on them with like, “What’s your plan? What are you going to do?” I know that’s a huge role for Mrs. XXXX, but that’s the title of Latino Student Coordinator. For a lot of these students, you’re going to have to be that teacher, that mentor, that person that’s getting them scheduled for any other testing, ACT, if they need to go talk with a teacher to make sure that they’re staying on top of their grades.

I know, for my parents, they don’t use the Internet that much. They don’t know how to use the Riverfront intranet system. Even if they did know how, they’re really busy. I’m not going to give them another thing to add aside from feeding and taking care of us. I know a lot of these students. I don’t know much about them, but I know that they’re coming out of similar backgrounds. (M8, 2016)

This deeply emotional account synthesizes the various anecdotes that many of the recruited Upper School Latino students shared during their interviews. Each of the sixteen recruited Latino students expressed a deep sense of gratitude and admiration for the Latino Student Coordinator for her initial efforts to facilitate the admissions process for Riverfront, an achievement that could not be underappreciated. The majority of parents of recruited Latino students received significant financial assistance, was immigrants with various degrees of English proficiency, and worked low-paying jobs that did not allow them to attend all school functions. As articulated by this student, ideally the Latino Student Coordinator should continue to support students as they navigated Riverfront. The current structure, however, wherein the Latino Coordinator, a full time position, coupled with another fulltime position, supervision of a school wide service in
addition to teaching a Spanish class, did not provide sufficient time to address student and family concerns.

In light of this dynamic, one particularly effective support mechanism that participants appreciated was the Latino affinity group, where they were able to find support, strategize to navigate Riverfront challenges, and build community with other Latino students. In the next section, I will share the genesis and nature of Riverfront’s Upper School Latino affinity group and the specific ways in which students described their attendance as beneficial to supporting their Riverfront experience.

**Riverfront Latino Affinity Group.** While Riverfront sponsored a number of student affinity groups based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and other shared identities, at the time of this study, the Riverfront Latino Affinity Group was fairly recent relative to the other race/ethnicity affinity groups. Black students, for instance, had three affinity groups for at least a decade—one for boys, another one for girls, and one for all Black students. Similarly, Asian students hosted four groups over six years.

The Latino Affinity group, different from the other Riverfront Affinity groups, was founded in 2012 by a freshman in response to his negative experiences as a Latino student in the Middle School. During the Upper School Latino student interviews, all sixteen participants found value in attending the affinity group as a place where they could enjoy a critical mass of Latino students in one space, share successes and celebrations, affirm their shared Latino identity, build community, and strategize around navigating stereotypes and microaggressions.
During an interview with the founder of the Latino Affinity group, I asked his initial motivation in starting the group.

Mostly just from seeing bad experiences. While I was going through my experience in Middle School, on the ride back home I would hear about my sister’s experience in high school and how she felt alone. I saw in her as well, the friends group she had wasn’t because—it wasn’t racially divided, it wasn’t anything like that. It was just like the same students who came in not knowing anyone, new students, that was her friend group. I guess it stayed her friend group—that kept being her friend group.

The group is for Latinos or Hispanics. I said that part. I guess it’s just a safe place to talk about anything related. What I definitely tried changing this year was that it doesn’t have to be all negative. I think that’s where we have kind of had a bad reputation where some people did not need that outlet and they were more than encouraged to come and speak in the group. If they needed to cry, if they needed to talk with a teacher or a counselor and go beyond that, they were great for that student that they were getting the help they needed. I guess then some other students came and found that they didn’t need to feel the same way as everyone in the group. They didn’t have any problems to share. They didn’t like the group, I guess. It was never about that. It was just having the time to share with people, moments of satisfaction, of happiness, sadness, whatever—just time of community. (M10, 2016)

The genesis of the Latino affinity group was meant to support Latino students to navigate Riverfront challenges. The freshman that established the club felt alone and unsupported in navigating Latino stereotypes and microaggressions during his Riverfront Middle School experience. Therefore, he initially conceived the group as a place where Latinos could leverage the collective wisdom of other Latinos to resolve negative issues they were experiencing related to their Latino identity. This initial blue print was significant in two primary ways. First, the motivating factor to establish the affinity group, providing support to navigate problems, informed the valence of the group moving forward, a singular frame that discouraged some Latinos from attending the group. Those Latinos who initially resisted attending the group were typically White Latinos or those
from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who did not necessarily experience the same forms and degree of microaggressions as the founder, a young man from a lower socioeconomic group and non-White phenotype. Secondly, as previously noted, due to the current nature of the Latino Student Coordinator’s position, she has not been able to serve as a mentor or advocate for students to the degree that students indicated that they needed her.

While student-generated clubs are fairly typical in independent schools, student-generated affinity groups in schools with a sitting diversity coordinator are highly atypical. In schools that have allocated resources to establish a diversity-related role, the group is typically established and sustained by this individual—generating agendas, curricula, inviting speakers, and aligning the group with affinity group best practices. The existence of a student-generated affinity club in a school with a Latino Coordinator indicated a dire need of students for additional supports.

As with many high school groups, the Latino Affinity Group meets concurrently with other activities, namely sports. If a student is involved on a team that practices in the morning, she or he is unable to attend the group. One senior, who found value in the group, described his dilemma:

I attend the group when I can. A lot of the time, because I now swim year round, and this is Lacrosse season right now. So, I’m actually swimming and doing Lacrosse. Every now and then, I’ve been to a few on the weekends. There’s been one or two this year and the same kind of thing last year. (M9, 2016)

In light of the challenges with the current configuration of the role of Latino Student Coordinator, whereby she also oversees a school wide service that supports all athletic events, in addition to serving as Latino Student Coordinator and teaching a
Spanish class, the Latino Affinity Group serves arguably an even more crucial need, particularly for younger students who recently arrived to Riverfront. When asked if he attended the group, a freshman responded,

Yeah. I guess I feel good to be around other people like me. I just like talking to them and going to the meeting to learn more about what we have to talk about. Usually it’s different. A couple of weeks ago we talked about how we were going to have meetings with you and with a person who does documentaries. Usually we talk about Hispanic meetings that are going on around the city that they tell us to go to. (M4, 2016)

Across age, gender, entry point, race, and tenure at Riverfront, all Latino students who participated in the study found that the Latino Affinity Group provided ongoing support to navigate the challenges that Latino students confronted at Riverfront. The students also expressed, however, a perception that the broader Riverfront community did not understand the need for the existence of the group or did not value the group. For instance, ten of sixteen participants referenced a recent assembly wherein three Latino-related groups were meant to share one forty-minute assembly slot—the Latino Affinity Group, the Spanish Exchange, and another Latino American exchange that Riverfront sponsors.

Based on details provided by students in the interviews, there were, in fact, a number of miscommunications between the Latino Student Coordinator, Upper School administrators, and students that resulted in the Latino Affinity Group ultimately having five minutes for their presentation. The students also expressed disappointment that, due to the Latino Student Coordinator’s schedule, she frequently was unavailable to provide support. Attempting to repress her tears, one of the student leaders of the Latino Affinity Group recounted,
We also had a video at the end. It had Marc Anthony and emphasis on that music video for their popular song. I thought it was really appropriate because there was tons of people dancing, and the different flags of different countries. It wasn’t just ‘Mexicans are the only Latinos.’ I was like, “Everyone’s getting represented in this.” Time ran out. Out of the whole presentation that we had done, that was the only part that we had contributed that was like, purely us.

It’s sad to say, but yeah. We always get late notice on everything; we don’t really ever have time to prepare for anything. If we do something, we pretty much have to do it ourselves. Like, the Day of the Dead altar. XXXX and I were here until like 6:30 pm putting it up. By ourselves. With the occasional other person coming in and helping us that was like, another Latino student. (F6, 2016)

In the final analysis, the Riverfront Upper School Latinos that participated in the study unanimously concurred that the Latino Affinity Group served a critical role in providing a safe place to affirm Latino identity, build community, and support each other as they navigated the challenges that existed for Latino students at Riverfront. Founded and sustained by a student also in the process of navigating his own racial and ethnic identity in addition to complying with the academic, social, and athletic demands of Riverfront, the group struggles with a number of challenges regarding organization, curriculum, and facilitation of potentially contentious conversations in a manner that respects divergent views. The Latino students also noted frustration that the Latino Student Coordinator’s schedule, which is compromised by her charge to supervise a school wide service and teach two Spanish classes, did not allow sufficient time to support Upper School Latino students fully once they arrived at Riverfront.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings suggested that Riverfront Upper School Latino students confronted numerous ongoing challenges at Riverfront that conspired to undermine their academic and social experiences. From their initial transitions at various entry points, to navigating pervasive stereotypes and microaggressions—microinsults,
microassaults, and microinvalidations— informed by their Latino identity, Riverfront students must develop additional strategies and resilience in order to achieve at high academic levels to remain at Riverfront in addition to preserving their sense of self.

From a curricular perspective, all of the Latino participants noted that Riverfront’s academic curriculum was disproportionately White and male with an occasional reference to Black Americans. Upper School Latino students reported learning nothing about Latino geography, history, authors, or other accomplishments, with the exception of *House on Mango Street* and the annual Hispanic Month assembly, which conflated Latino identity with Mexican Mariachi bands. Indeed, the lack of Latino presence in the curriculum served as a disservice to Latino and non-Latino students alike as related to fostering an inclusive student climate and preparing all students for a multicultural society, of which Latinos comprise a significant component.

On a positive note, the findings also suggested numerous glimmers of hope ranging from the support that Latinos provide and receive in the Latino affinity group to informal upperclassmen mentoring younger students on specific ways to navigate Latino stereotypes and microaggression at Riverfront. In the subsequent chapter, I will analyze the findings utilizing the research theoretical and conceptual framework explicated in Chapter 2.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Future Research

This final chapter is divided into four sections: 1) Research Questions and Findings that directly addresses the study’s research questions, leveraging the findings detailed in Chapter 4; 2) Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature, which analyzes research findings in the context of the theoretical and conceptual framework articulated in Chapter 2; 3) Implications for Riverfront: Study Recommendations, which explicates recommendations for cultivating a more inclusive school environment for Latinos at Riverfront, leveraging research findings, Riverfront Upper School Latino students’ suggestions, and my professional expertise; and 4) Limitations of Study/ Considerations for Further Study, which acknowledges limitations to the research while positing related topics that warrant ongoing investigation in hopes of enriching diversity and inclusivity efforts to support Latino students in independent schools.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature

Riverfront appears deeply committed to cultivating a school community wherein all students are able to reveal their full authentic selves. Recognizing inclusion as an extension of its mission statement, Riverfront boasts a longstanding commitment to diversity initiatives, which includes ongoing strategic partnerships with schools and advocacy organizations, increasing admissions outreach efforts to enfranchise non-traditional independent school students and families, generous financial aid and scholarship policies, faculty development around issues of diversity and inclusion, creation of diversity coordinators to advance cultural competency work in their respective divisions, and the establishment of a number of affinity groups to provide safe spaces
based on gender, religion, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

In the aggregate, these efforts to support the Riverfront community reflect the broader racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the area and region in which the school is located. Moreover, these initiatives want to ensure that all Riverfront members are able to flourish—irrespective of their background. In hopes of further enriching Riverfront diversity and inclusion efforts to support Latino students navigate a predominately White independent school, this aim of this qualitative phenomenological study was to learn more about the self-reported academic and social experiences of sixteen Riverfront Upper School students who self-identified as Latino.

This section analyzes the research findings leveraging the theoretical and conceptual frameworks presented in Chapter 2. The analysis will draw primarily from the following scholarly literature: the history of independent schools and the nature of diversity initiatives within this space, Hispanic and Latino Ethnic/Racial Models, and Microaggression Theory. The synthesis of the analysis noted that the current research findings are, in large part, consistent with extant literature regarding perceptions of exclusion that Black students experience in predominately White independent schools.

The experiences of Latino students in a predominately White independent school are amplified and further nuanced, however, by the vast diversity within the Latino ethnicity, which subsumes multiple races, twenty-two countries of origin, and Spanish as its shared language. None of these additional characteristics is neutral within a predominately White and wealthy independent school paradigm. Moreover, each aspect mediates a Latino student’s experience in additional and meaningful ways different from a Black student in a predominately White independent school environment. The
following pages further explicate these differences through leveraging the literature previously cited.

**Microaggressions and stereotypes.** Riverfront is a predominately White independent school located in the United States, where longstanding racial and socioeconomic tensions are deeply embedded in the national fabric. Given this macro-racial context, it follows that racial tensions in the greater society also manifest at Riverfront. Indeed, Riverfront’s Black students have expressed feelings of marginalization at the school over two decades (Riverfront correspondence, 2015). Their accounts align with dominant themes articulated in extant literature exploring the experiences of Black students: racial microaggressions, racial stereotyping, a sense of hypervisibility, absence from the curriculum, assumptions around intellectual capability, and a reticence of teachers to address diversity (Arlington & Stevenson, 2003). While certainly not perfect, a general heightened awareness around the experiences of Black students in independent schools, has, at the very least, brought these issues to the forefront. Consequently, Riverfront has engaged in specific efforts to improve the academic and social experience of Black students since 2001 (Director of Diversity communication, 2015).

This heightened awareness is due, in part, to a general understanding in education circles of the racial achievement gap, which fuels interest in learning more about the experience of Black students in schools (Kuriloff, Soto & Garver, 2011; Steele, 2003; Tatum, 2003). For example, Riverfront engaged in targeted professional development wherein teachers learned about the experiences of Black students, particularly boys, and strategies for being mindful with language usage. This sustained professional learning has
informed curricular enhancements and all English classes between 5th-12th grades read at least one Black author. Also, in efforts to create safe places for Black students, Riverfront created a number of Black student affinity spaces—one for boys and another one for girls in addition to Black parent affinity spaces. Finally, the genesis of the creation of the Director of Diversity was, in large part, conceived as serving as an additional resource for Black students and families at Riverfront.

The research found that Riverfront Upper School Latino students reported encountering pervasive racial stereotypes and microaggressions, which Sue (2010) described as brief, everyday exchanges that sent denigrating messages based on group membership. The findings indicated that the stereotypes and microaggressions were explicit, such as Riverfront students specifically telling Latino students not to speak Spanish at Riverfront, or covert, such as the nature of the pervasive jokes that all sixteen Upper School Latino students noted hearing on an ongoing basis at Riverfront. The nature of and ways in which Latino microaggressions manifested, however, drew a sharp distinction from Black microaggressions as a direct function of the social, political, and historical difference between Blacks and Latinos in the United States. Therefore, reliance on Black identity frameworks and corresponding diversity models informed by specific challenges of Black students in independent schools ultimately proved ineffective in designing effective strategies to support Latino students.

Sue (2010) enumerated the most common stereotypes associated with Latinos included “illegal aliens, foreigners, drug dealers, farm workers, poor, welfare recipients, tax avoiders, domestic servants, unskilled, criminals, dangerous, untrustworthy, greasy, sloppy, irresponsible, lazy, never on time, carefree, uninhibited, poor English,
uneducated, stupid and religious” (p. 154). Not surprisingly, the themes of the Latino jokes, a manifestation of conscious microinsults, that the Riverfront Upper School Latinos students heard mirrored these very themes, most notably associations of all Latinos as illegal aliens, foreigners, drug users, farm workers, poor, criminals, lazy, with poor English, and uneducated. For example, a Peruvian-American Latino student who played Riverfront soccer noted that one of his White teammates, after reprimanding him for speaking Spanish with his fellow Latino teammate, encouraged him to run as if he were running across the border from Mexico, evoking Latino stereotypes of foreigners, illegal aliens, poor, potentially dangerous, and uneducated. Similarly, another student who identified as a White Columbian-American Latino shared that his friends frequently jokingly asked him if he sold cocaine or needed a Green Card. These Latino jokes are consistent with larger societal Latino stereotypes and jokes.

Similarly, Sue (2010) posited that the most common microaggressions generally associated with Latinos were assumptions of foreign birth, ascriptions of intelligence, assumption of criminal status, second-class citizenship, invalidation of Latino experience, and pathologizing of cultural values and communication styles, all of which manifested during the research at Riverfront. For instance, while fifteen of the sixteen Latino students were born in the United States, the overwhelming majority reported numerous instances of their Riverfront classmates assuming that they were foreign-born and questioning their citizenship, which the Latino students perceived as yet another form of *othering*. Students also noted the pathologization of Latino cultural values and communication styles, including fashion, word choice, general aesthetics, decibel level when speaking, and general topics of conversation.
The most salient Latino microaggressions that emerged during this research—the stigmatization of the Spanish language and the conflation of all Latinos into Mexicans—directly correlated to dominant narratives in the United States around immigration and stereotypes around illegal aliens. In the context of the United States, this discourse typically conflates Latino identity with a myopic conception of all Latinos as abject, illegal, drug selling, Spanish-speaking Mexicans. While a deep discussion falls outside of the scope of this analysis, it is worth noting that Hispanophobia has deep roots in the United States (Weber, 1992), and that sociologists regard the English-only movement and Latino jokes and discourse as a modern extension of Hispanophobia (Zentella, 1997). The Riverfront School community is certainly not immune to this discourse, as evidenced by the pervasive nature and themes represented by the Latino jokes, stereotypes, and microaggressions, all which align with themes in extant microaggression literature.

**Latino and Latina racial identity orientations.** Equally critical to the research findings analysis is an understanding of the multilayered nature of the Latino ethnicity and the ways in which Latino students’ iterative understanding of their identity informs how they interpret and engage with the Riverfront environment. A deeper understanding of the Latino identity framework also serves as a valuable heuristic in designing differentiated supports for Latino students to navigate Riverfront effectively in ways that enrich their academic and social inclusion, while also supporting positive ethnic identity formation.

Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) characterized the complexities of the Latino ethnicity as “national origin subgroups are diverse in a variety of ways including geographic distribution, political affiliations, socioeconomic status, language use and
many cultural features” (p. 36). The Riverfront Upper School Latinos that participated in the research represented five countries from the Latino diaspora, White Latinos and non-white Latinos, various positionalities along the socioeconomic spectrum, ranging from students unable to pay train transportation to come to school to students whose parents own homes in the same affluent area where Riverfront exists, and students whose parents possess various degrees of English proficiency and often varying degrees of ownership of Riverfront. These intersecting identities mediate the experience of Latino students and manifest in significant ways related to their perception of social and academic inclusion at Riverfront.

Each of the sixteen Upper School Latino students that participated in the research conveyed a sense of ethnic pride, eagerly highlighting his or her family’s country of origin, the celebration and preservation of Latino culture, and a deep sense of connection with both their ancestral home country and a more global Latino identity. Indeed, leveraging Ferdman and Gallego’s (2001) Latino and Latina Identity Orientation model, none of the students who participated in the research identified purely as White. Whereas, the view of Latinos is negative, the view of Whites is positive, which espouses the notions of *mejor la raza*” (improve the race). Interestingly, many also noted, unsolicited, the realization that there were a number of White Latino students at Riverfront who check the box during admissions but then actively deny their Latino heritage at School. The students who participated in the research were both deeply offended by this self-denial of Latino identity, yet also surprisingly compassionate. The researcher intentionally invited those students who identified as White to participate in the research, but none ultimately participated. Those Latino students who did participate, however, mentioned ways in
which the hostile-Latino environment at Riverfront might inform a White Latino’s
decision to conceal his or her identity in hopes of mitigating stigmatism and
marginalization.

While each of the Latino student participants articulated an awareness of and
pride in their ethnic identity, the findings suggested variations of their ethnic
understandings informed by their racial identification—whether they identified as White
or non-White, which strongly correlated to country of origin and the racial/ethnic
composition of their school prior to attending Riverfront. All Latino student participants
who identified as Mexican, for example, also identified as non-White. Based on
Riverfront admissions efforts, this Mexican-American cohort also previously attended
high-performing public or charter schools, transitioned in middle and upper school, and
received significant financial assistance to attend Riverfront. Moreover, each of these
students transitioned to Riverfront from a predominately Latino school experience; in
fact, many noted that they had never consciously reflected on their Latino identity prior
to arriving to Riverfront. In fact, given the dominant Latino school population at their
previous schools, Upper School Latino research participants indicated that, prior to
Riverfront, they were more likely to identify by national subgroup—Mexican, Peruvian,
Columbian, El Salvadorian—rather than the umbrella Latino ethnonym.

The stark contrast upon arriving to Riverfront, where Latino students’
positionality shifted from majority to minority members, also informed their evolving
sense of their ethnic identity. Each of the self-identified non-White students was aware of
societal marginalization of Latinos, which informed how they viewed other ethnic and
racial groups including Whites. Prior to attending Riverfront, however, they had not
sustained ongoing engagement with marginalization during school in the form of Latino stereotypes and microaggressions. This new environmental paradigm required an ongoing analysis of ethnic identity and the generation of survival techniques to preserve their sense of self and comply with the academic and social demands of Riverfront.

The integration of these negative experiences around their Latino identity shifted their Latino and Latina Racial Identity Orientation from *subgroup-identified*, espousing a narrow lens and preferring individual Latino subgroups and Whites as not central to a *Latino-identified* orientation, wherein the view of Latinos as a group was positive, the view of Whites was as potential barriers or allies, based on demonstrated behaviors, and racial framing evolved to Latino/or not Latino. Time and time again throughout the interview process, non-White Upper School Latino student participants shared accounts of transitioning from their predominately Latino, high-performing public and charter schools, where they implicitly understood their Latino identity but viewed themselves as Mexican in their daily interactions at school. The transition to Riverfront, in many ways, served as a catalyst to inform a different understanding of their Latino identity and the critical need to develop survival strategies in a predominately White educational institution.

Among the sixteen Latino student participants, five identified as White-Latino. One of the five students attended Riverfront since Pre-K, and the remaining students transferred during middle school from élite independent schools. None of the students received financial aid to attend Riverfront and each of the students could ostensibly *choose* to share his or her Latino ethnicity at Riverfront. While these students indicated an awareness of Latino microaggressions and stereotypes, had heard Latino jokes, and
witnessed ways in which Latino ethnicity was marginalized and generally undervalued at Riverfront, these White-Latino students also recognized the ways in which their Whiteness, in a school that valued Whiteness, serves as a shield from being a direct target of Latino marginalization. Notwithstanding, these students were staunchly proud of their Latino heritage, openly shared and embraced their Latino heritage, and supported Latino diversity initiatives—accounts corroborated many times over by non-White Latino students.

Different from many ethnic and racial identity models, the Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) model was not meant to be conceived as linear, per se. Indeed, while decidedly identifying racially as White, these White-Latinos also encompassed a broad lens regarding understanding their racial and ethnic identity, while also viewing other Latinos very positively. Based on their personal intimacy and awareness of Latino marginalization, albeit through a White frame, these students, similar to non-White Latinos, also viewed Whites as either barriers or allies based on behavior and experiences. The differentiated insights that this Latino Racial Identity Orientation yields have significant implications regarding the intentional cultivation of an inclusive school community that supports all Latino students. The subsequent sections explicate these specific implications and recommendations.

**Implications for Riverfront: Study Recommendations**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the ways in which sixteen Riverfront Upper School Latino students understood their academic and social experiences at the school. The overall findings suggested that Upper School Latino students perceived that the Riverfront community marginalized and stigmatized Latino
ethnicity. These microaggressions manifested in Latino stereotypes, denigrating Latino jokes, conflation of Latino identity into a stereotypical abject Mexican illegal alien, stigmatization of the Spanish language and Latino culture, and an absence of Latino presence in the curriculum. These varying degrees of perception of marginalization informed the nature of Latino students’ transition at various entry points at Riverfront, often necessitating a reconciliation of Latino culture, embraced at home and in their previous schools, and Riverfront school culture, which marginalized and stigmatized Latino culture. This ongoing dialectic between navigating integration and assimilation models further iterated the Latino students’ understanding of their ethnic identity in meaningful ways that provided insights to develop survival strategies to navigate Riverfront, comply with academic requirements, and maintain a sense of authentic self.

A secondary research question explored the ways in which Upper School Latino students perceived that their race or socioeconomics also mediated understandings of their social and academic experiences. The research found that, while White Latino students were aware of Latino stereotypes and microaggressions, they perceived that their Whiteness mitigated the frequency and nature of marginalization, whereby they were less frequently the targets of Latino marginalization. White Latinos also indicated that, due to Riverfront’s narrow conception of all Latinos as non-White, Riverfront students and faculty often did not regard these whiter students as Latino. Regarding socioeconomics, five of the sixteen students who identified as White Latino also indicated they did not receive financial aid.

Conversely, each of the eleven Latino students who identified as non-White Latinos indicated receiving significant financial assistance to attend Riverfront. They also
noted a number of socioeconomic challenges including ongoing instances wherein they were unable to participate in cost-prohibitive social events, such as class trips to the Bahamas, after-Prom parties with entrance fees totaling hundreds of dollars, or dining at expensive restaurants with their classmates. While these particular socioeconomic issues are not singularly rooted in Latino ethnicity, the socioeconomic burdens that the non-White Latino students articulated, coupled with Latino stereotypes and microaggressions, exacerbated the overall challenges these Latino students encountered.

The previous section analyzed the general findings, leveraging the research theoretical and conceptual framework and drawing primarily from the following scholarly literature: the history of independent schools and the nature of diversity initiatives within these spaces, Hispanic and Latino Ethnic/Racial Models, and Microaggression Theory. The analysis showed the research findings consistent with extant literature exploring Black students’ perceptions of marginalization, but drew meaningful distinctions as a result of the different social, political, and historical differences between Black and Latino experiences. Additional aspects found in Latino analysis included twenty-two different national perspectives, immigration, multiple races, and shared Spanish languages. These considerations differentiated the Latino experiences, the nature of marginalization and, therefore, the design of effective structure to support Latino students in predominately White institutions.

The following section explores recommendations that Riverfront might consider to support its ongoing diversity and inclusivity efforts for Latino students. The recommendations are informed by Riverfront Upper School Latino students’ recommendations, the research findings and subsequent analysis, and my professional
expertise as a national consultant on issues of diversity and inclusion.

**Reconfigure the role of Latino Student Coordinator.** The genesis of the position of Latino Student Coordinator was to recruit Latino students to Riverfront and to provide additional supports once Latino students became part of the community. As currently configured, the Latino Student Coordinator also divides her time between two additional roles: supervisor and coordinator of a school wide resource and teacher for three sections of Spanish. This role configuration is untenable, and ironically undermines the explicit aims of the position—to increase Latino student population and support them throughout their tenure—while also undermining the Latino Student Coordinator’s ability to be successful, potentially jeopardizing personal and professional relationships.

While students in the study were appreciative of her efforts during the admissions process, helping Latino students and their families navigate the unfamiliar independent school admission process in addition to providing financial support to cover fees, the students overwhelming perceived that the Latino Student Coordinator was largely unavailable for support once they became Riverfront students. For some participants, this manifested in resentment that the person who was meant to support them was rarely available in her office or not returning emails, yet can be seen supporting non-Latino students in her second responsibility. This resentment could certainly deepen if the role were not reconfigured.

Given the findings of this study regarding Latino stereotypes and microaggressions that Riverfront Upper School Latino students encounter on a daily basis, it is imperative that Latino students have access to an adult advocate to support their navigation of Riverfront in ways that support their positive ethnic identity formation
and academic and social inclusion. Moreover, Riverfront and all schools must understand that cultivating a school environment that mirrors the identity-rich and cosmopolitan nature of respective regions and the country benefits all students—not just students of color. Given current demographic shifts, all students will require cultural competency skills to communicate across difference with respect in an increasingly racially and ethnically cosmopolitan 21st century society. In short, not learning about the contributions and accomplishments of Latinos to the country and the world and cultivating knowledge, skills, and competencies to interact with Latinos as human equals serves as a disservice to all Riverfront students and ill-prepares them for success in college and the workforce and ill-preparing students for thoughtful and informed global citizenship.

**Expand and diversify Latino outreach models.** In recent years, Riverfront has successfully increased the number of Latino students attending the school in all divisions. Notwithstanding, the current model generated a polarized Latino community, consisting of Latino students who receive little or no financial aid or Latino students who are intentionally recruited from high-poverty public and charter schools that require significant aid. This model yields a Latino student population with little socioeconomic diversity in ways that either reifies stereotypes of the poor Latino or discourage Riverfront Latinos from wealthier families to avoid identifying as Latino.

Moving forward, Riverfront should broaden recruitment efforts to include a greater socioeconomic spectrum of Latinos. One suggestion is to couple current Latino partners, which largely consists of public schools in lower class communities, with middle and upper class Latino organizations, fraternities and sororities, and faith-based
organizations. Similarly, Riverfront should revisit the current financial model, whereby Riverfront invests financial aid dollars disproportionately to support Latino students who enter in Upper School and Middle School. This model yields an uneven distribution of Latinos among the divisions; thus, the lived experience of Latinos and non-Latinos in the lower and middle schools is largely informed by a lack of Latino presence. Each of the sixteen students that participated in the research underscored the importance of a critical mass of Latino students in supporting their sense of psychological safety and ability to bring their full authentic selves to school in ways that did not undermine their academic or social inclusion. Riverfront is to be commended for their efforts and encouraged to deepen work to cultivate a critical mass of Latino students that represent socioeconomic diversity within the Latino diaspora.

**Buttress Latino Affinity Group and institute formal mentoring program.**

Irrespective of race, socioeconomic group, gender, grade, or entry point, each of the sixteen Upper School Latino students values the critical role of the Latino affinity group to support their Riverfront journey. In light of the current ineffective organizational configuration whereby the Latino Student Coordinator’s time divides between two roles, the affinity group serves as a critical proxy to support Upper School Latino students.

However, the Latino affinity group was spearheaded and sustained by a freshman student who will soon graduate. During interviews, students expressed deep concern and growing frustration that time constraints prevent the Latino Student Coordinator from providing adequate stewardship regarding planning affinity group meeting agenda, advocating for resources, coordinating schedules among divisions for assemblies and programs, and serving as a faculty advisor. If the challenges around time allocation are
not resolved through reconfiguration of the role or via other means, such as delegation of responsibilities among multiple adults, this current dynamic threatens to undermine the Latino Student Coordinator’s relationships with Latino students, families, and colleagues. There is also the distinct possibility that the affinity group will cease to exist after graduation of the current student founder of the group, which would further marginalize Latino students. I cannot overemphasize the critical need to reconfigure the current role of Latino Student Coordinator to provide time to support Upper School Latino students after their admission to Riverfront.

Riverfront Upper School Latino students navigate multiple stages of their racial/ethnic identity formation and, therefore, have differentiated needs. They all concur, however, that the affinity group helps affirm their Latino identity and build Latino community. The affinity group also allows a safe space for productive venting and subsequent brainstorming with other Latino students to learn strategies to navigate Riverfront’s social and academic challenges. Finally, the affinity group serves as a necessary space to celebrate successes, eat Latino food, share Latino dance, learn about Latino history and holidays, and reconcile Latino and school cultures.

The affinity group has also served as a mechanism to facilitate meaningful organic mentoring relationships between and among Upper School Latino students. Upper School Latino study participants shared that the insights they gleaned and the Riverfront-specific strategies they learned during these relationships proved essential in understanding and navigating the Riverfront ethnic/racial paradigm. Indeed, these mentor relationships are far too important to leave to chance and should be formally coordinated by the Latino Student Coordinator. Moreover, I recommend that all incoming Latino
students be paired with a Latino student mentor even before their arrival to ensure that all Riverfront Latino students have at least one Latino student advocate, thought partner, and mentor to assist in their initial and ongoing processing of Riverfront Latino challenges.

*Provide ongoing faculty development and student and parent education to mitigate racial microaggressions.* The Latino Student Coordinator, in consultation with divisional Diversity Coordinators and division heads, should collaboratively develop workshops, advisory lessons, and school wide assembly curricula to educate Riverfront students on the history, experiences, and contributions of Latinos in hopes of reducing Latino stereotypes and microaggressions. These lessons should also identify Latino stereotypes and microaggressions in hopes of heightening awareness around these behaviors as a strategy to reduce stereotypes and mitigate microaggressive behavior in the community. Current Riverfront models are either celebratory (listening to a Mariachi group during the annual Hispanic Heritage student assembly), too broad and focusing on abstract notions of *diversity*, or speak specifically to the Black experience. Beginning as young as Lower School, students must engage with various representations of the Latino experience to counter the dominant narrative and single story of the abject Mexican illegal. These lessons should continue throughout Middle and Upper Schools, not only during assemblies, but also during advisory meetings, informal conversations, and curricular discussions.

Finally, Riverfront must also sustain faculty development to familiarize teaching faculty and staff with Latino ethnicity orientation models in hopes of empowering all faculty beyond the Latino Student Coordinator and Diversity Coordinators to support Latino students, while also integrating these crucial themes into their parent education.
programs.

**Hire Latino faculty and integrate Latinos into the curriculum.** Currently, less than 5% of Riverfront’s approximate one hundred Upper School teachers identifies as Latino (Riverfront, 2016). Riverfront sustained efforts in the past to recruit faculty of color, understood as Black teachers. Moving forward, Riverfront must expand its efforts also to hire Latino teachers in hopes of cultivating a teaching force that represents the racial and ethnic diversity of society, recognizing that all students will benefit from increased exposure to multiple forms of teacher leadership.

Additionally, Riverfront should provide content-specific professional development to support teachers’ integration of geography, histories, cultures, literature, arts, and contributions of Latino America. This curriculum will provide students at all grade levels an opportunity to learn specifically about the cultures and contributions of Latino Americans in the United States, an ever-growing part of the population. While this work is applicable to all disciplines, special emphasis should be placed on English, history, and the arts because these disciplines provide organic spaces to sustain dialogue, process assumptions, and integrate new insights.

**Limitations of Study/Considerations for Future Research**

I currently serve as a resource to schools, domestically and abroad, to cultivate inclusive school communities. A large part of my work in independent schools, which are often predominately White, centers around assessing racial climates and partnering with administrators, faculty, parents, and students to provide tools and strategies to cultivate an inclusive school climate wherein every student can bring his or her full and authentic self. Thus, my initial motivation for designing the current research was predicated on my
disappointment in discovering the dearth of extant literature that explores the experience of Latinos in independent schools.

However, as I was designing the research methodology, I soon learned that a critical challenge of collecting Latino data is that Latino ethnicity comprises a number of significant subgroups, the most salient of which is race, that do not always align with conventional understandings in the United States. Given the frequent binary conception of race in the United States within a paradigm of White supremacy, White Latinos are presented the opportunity of highlighting or repressing their White and/or Latino identity.

In the context of Riverfront, this manifests as a dynamic whereby a number of students who self-identified as Latino during the admissions process did not claim Latino heritage during their daily interactions at School. While exact numbers are challenging to calculate, the Latino Student Coordinator estimates that there are approximately eight to ten Riverfront Latino students who fall into this category (Communication with Latino Student Coordinator, 2016). In terms of limitations of this research, while five of the sixteen student participants identified as White Latino, the remaining eleven identified as non-White Latino. To what extent this informs the research findings is unclear, but this certainly represents both a limitation to consider as well as a future area of research.

A second limitation centers on the degree to which the research was able to explore socioeconomic intersections adequately. Socioeconomic disclosure within the United States framework presents numerous challenges around confidentiality. These challenges are further pronounced in an independent school community founded and sustained by upper class value systems. Given the significant socioeconomic positionality disparity between many of the Latino student participants and Riverfront, delving deeply
into socioeconomic experiences, even within a safe interview environment, would require considerably more time to cultivate a trusting environment where students would feel more comfortable being vulnerable around socioeconomic disclosure and the ways in which it conflates with Latino identity to inform their Riverfront experience. In a similar vein, another area of research might explore the ways in which Latino students leverage various forms of social and cultural capital to navigate schools.

Finally, the third limitation, related to socioeconomics, is the intersection of socioeconomic status and White racial identity for each of the Riverfront Upper School Latino participants. More specifically, each of the Upper School Latino participants who identified as White also self-identified as not receiving financial aid to attend Riverfront. Similarly, each of the Latino participants who identified as non-White also disclosed receiving significant financial assistance to attend Riverfront. In a school environment where Whiteness and high socioeconomic position also conflate, teasing out the influence of one or both of these social identities presents challenges.

Future research might examine more closely the intersection of gender and Latina ethnicity. While some insightful data emerged from this study, the intentionally broad scope of the research questions and the limited time frame did not provide sufficient depth to generate a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the intersection of gender and ethnicity for Latinos.

Recognizing the critical influence of teacher perception on student self-efficacy and learning outcomes, future research might also examine and compare the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of Latino and non-Latino teachers relative to either Latino student academic performance or Latino perception of Latino and non-Latino teacher
perception of Latinos. The insights might illuminate critical blindspots and unconscious teacher bias in ways that might inform faculty development for all teachers to enhance their support of all students, including Latino students.

My final hope is that educators, researchers, and policy makers will take interest in generating a robust body of rigorous research exploring the experiences of Latinos in independent schools. The Latino population in the United States has grown significantly since the 1990s and will continue to expand. As we sustain and deepen our diversity and inclusivity efforts in a society where longstanding racial distributions shift in meaningful ways, it will be important to generate data to inform the design of admissions strategies, teaching and learning, and school routines that support the social and academic well-being of Latinos.
Appendix A: Child Assent Form

**Title of the Research Study:** *Somos Latinos: The Experiences of Latino Students at an Independent School*

My name is Derrick Gay, and I am conducting a research study as part of my doctoral work for the University of Pennsylvania. Building on the conversations that we had last year in focus groups and during the Latino affinity groups, my goal is to learn more about the diverse experiences of Latino students. My hope is to provide nuanced information and suggestions to support the school in its mission to create and sustain an inclusive environment for all students.

As part of the study, I may observe you and your classmates during the school day and may participate in some school activities. You will also be invited to participate in a focus group or individual interview. Interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You may ask me to stop the audio recording at any time.

Any personal information obtained during the course of this research study will be kept private. I will create codes for each participant that I will keep secure in my home office. Transcripts of focus groups, interviews, and observational field notes will also be secured in my office. Additionally, I will not use names in any part of my analysis. If you participate in a focus group, we ask that you respect the privacy of others. However, I cannot guarantee that other focus group members will not share any information outside of the focus group.

The research will be conducted during one of your free periods on campus in a discreet area. You will not need to miss school for the focus group or interview process. There is no financial benefit associated with participating in the study. However, your participation could help the school better understand the experience of Latino students, which will support the school’s mission to create an inclusive environment.

Finally, please note that your participation is completely voluntary and that you are able to discontinue your participation at any time. Moreover, your participation in this research will have no bearing on your academic or financial relationship with the school. If you have any questions, please contact me at: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Student name:

Student signature:

Date:
Appendix B: Faculty Consent Form

Title of the Research Study: Somos Latinos: The Experiences of Latino Students at an Independent School

My name is Derrick Gay, and I am conducting a research study as part of my doctoral work for the University of Pennsylvania. Building on last year’s student focus group conversations and XXXXXXX discussions, my goal is to learn more about the diverse experiences of Latino students. My hope is to provide nuanced information and suggestions to support the school in its mission to create and sustain an inclusive environment for all students.

As part of the study, I will invite you to participate in a focus group or individual interview to learn more about your perceptions of the experiences of Latino students at the school. Interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. You may refuse to answer any question at any time. Similarly, you may request that I stop the audio recording at any time.

Any personal information obtained during the course of this research study will be kept private. I will create codes for each participant that I will keep secure in my home office. Transcripts of focus groups, interviews, and observational field notes will also be secured in my office. Additionally, I will not use names in any part of my analysis. If you participate in a focus group, we ask that you respect the privacy of others. However, I cannot guarantee that other focus group members will not share any information outside of the focus group.

The research will be conducted in your classroom, the XXXXXXX Room or another discreet area on campus of your choice. There is no financial benefit associated with participating in the study. However, your participation could help the school better understand the experience of Latino students, which will support the school’s mission to create an inclusive environment.

Finally, please note that your participation is completely voluntary and that you are able to discontinue your participation at any time. Moreover, your participation in this research will have no bearing on your professional or financial relationship with the school. If you have any questions, please contact me at: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Name:

Signature:

Date:
Appendix C: Latino Parent Association Talk to Frame Research

Saludos a todos. Estoy super agradecido de poder compartir con ustedes hoy. Y compartir de la mejor manera— con rica comida latina!

Les digo de ante mano que la Señora XXXXX ya me avisó que tengo 5 minutos y que si sobrepaso que no me van a dar las arepas que sobren. Así que voy a ser breve con mis comentarios.

Me llamo Derrick Gay y soy consultante en el area de la diversidad— trabajando con estudiantes, maestros, administradores y padres para enriquecer comunidad. Aunque no lo parezca, tengo casi 20 años trabajando con escuelas privadas en Estados Unidos y otras partes de mundo— como maestro de idiomas, maestro de música y administrador. Nací en Chicago pero vivo en nyc desde hace 13 anos.

Como quizás hayan visto, ya soy parte de la familia xxxxxxx porque llevo 6 años trabajando con la escuela en el area de la diversidad— desarrollo profesional para los maestros, asambleas para estudiantes, charlas para los padres, aconsejador para administradores y reuniones con varios grupos para escuchar y aprender sobre sus necesidades.

Y este es el propósito del trabajo que vamos a realizar — o mejor dicho- seguir este ano: escuchar a los estudiantes para aprender como mejor podemos apoyarlos.

Como mencionó XXXXX, ya empezamos el proceso con XXXXXXX el año pasado. También el año pasado, yo personalmente inicié conversaciones con un grupo de estudiantes en la escuela superior para aprender sobre sus experiences, tantos buenas como no tan buenas.

La estrategia es simple— Entendemos que no podemos apoyar a los estudiantes sin saber y entender lo que ellos necesitan.

Y eso no viene de nosotros, los adultos- porque no vivimos la vida diaria de los estudiantes. Esa información tiene que venir de los estudiantes. Así que tenemos preguntarles a ellos que es lo que necesitan para apoyarlos a que no solo termine la escuela, sino que realicen sus sueños— entrar en una buena universidad, conseguir un carrera que les apasionen, y ser buena persona.

Estas charlas entonces representan una oportunidad para continuar estas importantes conversaciones. Por supuesto, las conversaciones voluntarias. Así que si su hijo o hija elige participar, les mandaremos a ustedes, los padres,mas detalles sobre el proceso. Y espero que si participan por que ya hemos aprendido mucho de los estudiantes que nos ayudado— por ejemplo con los medios de transporte y las dificultades que algunos encontraron con los horarios y las guaguas escolares
Para concluir, solo quisiera aprovechar esta oportunidad para conocerlos personalmente y agradecerle el privilegio de poder trabajar con sus hijos. Y espero verlos pronto en otra ocasión.

**Riverfront Latino Parent Talk**
(Translation from Spanish)

I’m delighted to be here, but I will warn you in advance that xxxxxxx has advised me that I have 5 minutes. And if I go over that they are not going to give me the leftover arepas, so I will be brief with my comments.

My name is Derrick Gay, and I serve a consultant in the area of diversity—working with students, teachers, administrators to enrich community. Although it may be hard to believe, I have almost 20 years of experience working with private schools in the United States and other parts of the world—as a language teacher, music teacher and administrator. I was born in Chicago but have lived in NYC for the past 13 years.

As you have seen, I am also part of the xxxxxxx family because I have been working for the past 6 years on issues of diversity—professional development for teachers, student assemblies, parent talks, consultant for administrators and meetings with various groups to listen and learn about their needs.

And this is the goal of the work that we are going to realize—or more accurately said—that we will continue this year: listen to students to learn how we can best support them.

As XXXX mentioned, we already began the process with XXXXXXXXX last year. Also last year, I personally initiated conversations with a group of students in the Upper School to learn more about their experiences—the good as well as the not so good.

The strategy is simple—We acknowledge that we are unable to support students without knowing and listening to what they need.

And this does not come from us, the adults—because we don’t experience the daily experiences of our students. This information has to come from the students. That’s why we need to ask them personally what they need to support them—not only so that they finish school, but also so that they realize their dreams—study at a good university, enter a career that inspires then, and to be a good person.

These conversations represent an opportunity to continue these important conversations. And, to be sure, the conversations are voluntary. So if your son or daughter decides to participate, we will send you, the parent, more details about the process. And we do hope that they will participate because we have already learned so much from the students who have already participated, for example, with the transportation and challenges that some students encountered with schedules and the school bus.
In closing, I’d like to take this opportunity to get to know you all personally and to thank you for the privilege of working with your children. I certainly hope to see you in the future.
References


About PoCC. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://pocc.nais.org/about/Pages/About-PoCC.aspx


131


Kitzinger J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. Sociology of Health and Illness, 16, 103-121.


133


