THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE:
THE NEGOTIATION OF SPACE AND PLACE FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL

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

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

Conclusions from this dissertation include several resonant points to the study of high school education, race, gender, and sexual orientation. First, the performances of self that the students of color implemented in order to participate in the underlife of the institution as well as the broader school culture were, on one hand, layers of protection against the culture in which they worked to participate. On the other, such performances functioned to both constrain and enable students of color in their everyday experiences in
school. In addition, this dissertation concludes that the curricula—formal, hidden, enacted, and null—functioned as a mechanism to suffocate the ways of being and knowing of students of color. Finally, this study explores the intersection of gender with race, discussing how marginalization for girls of color functioned in separate and yet imbricated ways to the experiences of their male counterparts.
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CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW:

PRESENCES AND ABSENCES IN SPACES, PLACES, AND CURRICULA

To handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one’s aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime. It is strange, then, that the friends of truth and the promoters of freedom have not risen up against the present propaganda in the schools and crushed it. This crusade is much more important than the anti-lynching movement, because there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom. Why not exploit, enslave, or exterminate a class that everybody is taught to regard as inferior? (Woodson, 1933, p. 3)

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how normalized structures and interactions impact the ways that marginalized high school students negotiate physical places and sociocultural spaces in schools. Specifically, the primary question that guided this study is: How do normalized structures and interactions impact the ways that marginalized high school students negotiate physical places and sociocultural spaces in school? Along similar lines, I also had in mind sub-questions such as: How do students of color use places to create a presence in predominantly Anglo schools? Are there ontological and epistemological lessons explored in groups formed by students of color and, if so, are they intentional? What can students of color teach us about their experience and what schooling means to them in the context of this study? What happens when, as Winfield (2007) suggested, students of color recognize that the curricula is socio-politically and historically aligned against their ways of being? Finally, how do
students of color respond when they cannot negotiate a space where their ways of being and knowing are often normalized?

As is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, although the central question posed above continued to guide the study as it unfolded, strong ethnographic inquiry necessitates that guiding and additional questions change in light of the data (Agar, 1996; Erickson, 1986). In this instance, what began as a study of how students of color negotiated spaces and places at a predominantly Anglo high school, became a study of the presences and absences that strongly impacted this student populations’ ways of being, understandings that were significant to both their academic and social roles at school. Making this adjustment in light of the data was similarly important to the scope of the questions I pursued throughout this dissertation. In addition to the questions posed above, I also wondered: Does the friction (Tsing, 2005) of the ways of being of students of color against Anglo, heteronormative spaces lead to a particular kind of cultural re-production? How do students of color utilize cultural capital to negotiate their marginalization? How are gender and the enactment of gender norms as they intersect with race significant to the negotiation of schooling? Finally, how do students utilize the performances of self in the everyday (Goffman, 1959) life to create spaces and places in school?

The examination of these and related questions calls for an inquiry into the ways curricula—formal, hidden, enacted, and null—affects students of color in all aspects of their everyday experiences in school. Such a focus requires attention to events as they occur from the classrooms to the corridors, between places and within a multiplicity of
spaces (Heath, 1983; Jackson, 1968; Metz, 1978; Nespor, 1997; Tatum, 2003). This places emphasis not only on how students are affected by such spaces and places but also on students’ ability to find wiggle room for resistance and resilience (Helfenbein, 2010) as a response to wrestling with questions of self, agency, and power. It is at the intersection of normalized cultural ideals (Bourdieu, 1993; E. T. Hall, 1977) and the multiple, fluid facets of identity for students of color, that this study at Bridgeport¹ Senior High School, a large, predominantly Anglo suburban high school began.

I begin here in Chapter 1 by reviewing the historical, ontological, and material consequences for the marginalization of students of color through the structure of schooling. The importance of the literature in this case is twofold. First, it underscores a longstanding history of the (un)intentional marginalization of students of color, for how does one characterize systemic marginalization over more than a century? From this perspective, there is significance in attending to the multiple ingresses, dimensions, and connections to the ways that questions of race are central to the field of curriculum studies (e.g., Castenell & Pinar, 1993). In this case, as the historical contexts meet the discursive contours of the current field (Pinar, 2007), understanding this intersection for its practical implications for the students it affects is a crucial conceptualization within the field. Second, it builds a platform from which students of color negotiate the multiple spaces and places of schooling, an essential issue explored in this study.

The second chapter explores my argument for the use of ethnographic methodology as a framework for the study. As an exploration of the forms of

¹ All proper nouns used in this study are pseudonyms.
ethnographic work and the multiple possibilities that interpretive inquiry can produce, I have included a discussion of non-traditional forms of representation, through sonic ethnography, as a necessity for transparency and reflexivity in the attempt to embody the sensuality, the subtle complexities, of the lived experiences of students. The inclusion of sounds to accompany text attends to the sensorium in ways that move away from ocular privileging and toward a representation of the senses that are entwined with the lived experience, it creates space for what was said but is not heard in the data, the voice of the local actors (Gershon, 2011, 2013a; Gershon & Wozolek, 2013). Inversely while attention to all senses, both Western and non-Western, is important here as a form of transparency, reflexivity, and collaboration as a way to nuance ethnographic interpretation, it is understood that their equal representation may not be possible within the traditional limits of dissertation work. However sitting within the paradox of the crisis of representation, sonic ethnography functions to speak to and disrupt scholarly forms of representation by using emerging technologies to in ethnographic practice (Gershon, 2013a).

The third chapter specifically focuses on the corridors of Bridgeport Senior High School. The underlife of the institution (Goffman, 1961) is emphasized; particularly the ways students of color negotiate broader sociocultural norms and values in the school in order to explicate their participation in the underlife of the institution. As a racialized hidden curriculum in the school is explored, material consequences of this curriculum for students of color is investigated. Similarly, I also attend to the ways students of color enact their agency within this context of racialized norms and values.
Chapter 4 focuses on the spaces and places students of color most frequently mapped or discussed through interviews. These places range from academic settings to the cafeteria. In contrast to the third chapter, this chapter more closely attends to the ways in which students of color negotiate schooling in both non-academic and academic spaces and places. A brief concluding chapter discusses the ways that each space contributes to the ways of being and knowing of students of color within Bridgeport, future implications of this study, and connections to broader sociocultural questions.

**Literature Review: Remembering the Spaces and Places History Created**

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the questions of presence and absence in the curriculum, places and spaces in schools, and in identity and school culture. As Molly Quinn (2010) articulated, the field of curriculum studies is haunted by those who have been left out, the strangers present in the everyday interactions of schooling. Whereas the past narratives of these strangers are often obfuscated by a cultural historical amnesia (S. Hall, 1997), it is important to remember that both past and present experiences do not function in isolation (Berry, 2010). In this way, what “was” is deeply entwined with what “is,” generating and supporting the structures of schooling that students of color, the normalized strangers in education, are left to negotiate (Cooper, 1892; Rist, 1973; Woodson, 1933).

Contextualized and layered by a group’s collective memory (Winfield, 2007), the multiple, knotted interactions nested in schools (Nespor, 1997) are central to school culture. As is the case in all structures, how a group remembers the process of and participants in that construction is significant to how a structure such as contemporary
schooling is currently perceived and maintained. It is important to note here that the “structure” is twofold. In one conception it is the physical building that is designed to both house and control education (Noguera, 2003). Second, and as it is primarily used here, it is the underlying organization that drives school culture and disseminates knowledge in both implicit and explicit ways (Apple, 1993; DuBois, 1903; Rist, 1973; Winfield, 2007; Woodson, 1933).

These underlying structures are woven by particular narratives. For example, just as eugenicists shaped ideas and ideals of intelligence using tools like IQ tests in schools (Winfield, 2007), Anglo narratives tend to permeate the formal curriculum, further marginalizing students of color and Others. The doubled marginalization through the structures of schooling are influenced and supported by collective memories (Winfield, 2007) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1993). Collective memory exists at the juncture of one’s present actions as they are influenced by historical lines (Winfield, 2004). As Winfield argued, “the role of collective memory in education has the potential to reveal the extent to which what we say that we do is congruent with what we actually do” (p. 14). More concretely, as historical ideas and ideals become entrenched in one’s way of knowing, it becomes a factor in one’s actions.

These everyday actions, interactions, norms, and values in schools eventually embed themselves in the habitus (Bourdieu, 1993) of schooling. Therefore understanding how students of color negotiate these structures that are embedded with normalized actions and ways of knowing is, in part, looking at how students make sense and find wiggle room to traverse the habitus that permeates the layers of schooling.
Through attending to the habitus of schooling and the collective memories that frame how one is in schools, one can better understand how normalized structures in schools can both intentionally and unintentionally marginalize students of color.

This literature review serves to both critique and build on literature as it relates to both the contexts of schooling and students of color. Literature from multiple fields have been included in this review in order to better provide a more nested and layered set of understandings about the complex intersection of schooling, students and race. As schools were not designed with the goal of equity (Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007), understanding the complexities students of color currently negotiate requires attending to each part of a structure that for marginalized students is “designed for, populated by and controlled by others” (Nespor, 1997, p. 91). To be clear, schooling affects students in intricate ways regardless of factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or ability (e.g., Quinn & Meiners, 2009; Tatum, 2003; Valente, 2011; Willis, 1977). Here I focus on the journey of being and knowing in schools for students of color that has been well established as knotted and complex in regards to questions such as structure, power, space, place, and history (Apple, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2010; Cooper, 1892; Delpit, 1995; DuBois, 1926; Gordon, 1993; Nespor, 1997; Woodson, 1933). The teasing apart of these concepts may yet render an understanding as to how these questions have been folded into the complex knot that makes up the educational noose that has emotionally and practically lynched students of color in both historical and contemporary contexts (Woodson, 1933).
However, although multiple fields provide complex articulations of the following arguments, my understandings are primarily framed through the lens of sensory studies that will also serve as a framework through which other fields are grounded and contextualized. This is because it is difficult for one to understand how students negotiate predominantly Anglo spaces and places without also understanding how they make sense in and of their worlds. Students do not negotiate their worlds in a vacuum, sans the sensorium. Rather, the foundation of their sociocultural constructs and understandings are woven within the affective sensorium (Feld & Basso, 1996; Gershon, 2011; Hamilakis, 2014; Howes, 2003; Howes & Classen, 2014; Levent & Pascual-Leone, 2014). The sensual lives we all live, the process of sensation and signification, on one hand allow us to organize, conceptualize, and construct meaning and knowledge and, on the other, provide the opportunity to examine questions of power, agency, and identity (Gershon, 2011). Just as one’s identity is imbricated with space and place (Helfenbein, 2010), spaces and places are nested within the sensorium (Gershon, 2013a).

This review therefore begins with students, teachers, and administrators, the “who” in schools, unpacking ontological and epistemological complexities as they relate to affect, ways of knowing, and school culture. It is therefore a review not only of the people but also their relation to each other, the school, curriculum, and other parts as they move through and with the children they affect. This is followed by a discussion on the “what” of schooling, the curricular forms that strongly influence sociocultural norms and values as well as students’ ways of knowing, being, and (re)acting in schools. The final section in this chapter focuses on the “where” of schooling, the formation of space and
place. Other central aspects to education such as agency, power, and culture are examined throughout this review as they are imbricated in structures of schooling and the daily negotiations that students of color encounter in order to simply “be” with/in schools. Throughout this chapter I use the term “negotiations” to refer to the kinds of ordinary, everyday interactions between local actors in and through which they work together to make meaning and understand one another, constructions that are further contextualized by layers of sociocultural norms and values. For example, the kinds of negotiations in which students of color often engage include dialogues and silences as well as the implicit and explicit re-actions students utilize in order to traverse the tensions of schooling. Although it is important to remember that whereas sometimes these negotiations are intentional, they can also be more of a cultural reflex. Further, these tensions can exist between students, staff, curricula, and school structures. This means that negotiations exist within a fluid multiplicity of possibilities that are context dependent. Whereas all students naturally negotiate various situations in schools, here I specifically attend to those students of color as their daily marginalization is the focus of this study. For it is, as I discuss below, the friction (Tsing, 2005) between marginalized students and schooling that necessitates such negotiations. In sum, this study looks at not only those who negotiate schooling but what they negotiate in their everyday lives. I begin here with ontological questions about what it means to be a person of African descent and for young Black bodies in schools.
Negotiating Legitimate Being in Schooling

Everyday ideas and ideals of Blackness are imprinted on children’s bodies and ways of being (Mills, 1998). What does it mean, for example, to be Black? The normative structures of schooling both engender and maintain these conventional ideas and ideals of Blackness through curricula, school culture, and structure (DuBois, 1903; Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1933). In schools both the implicit and explicit messages are constantly (re)sounding in students’ ways of being and knowing. For marginalized populations, these ways of being and knowing are not only felt but also reified through the process of schooling. In other words, school teaches students not only academic information about ideas but also social information about ideals and their relation to Others. This is a significant point for the ways of being for all children in school. For example, if a child’s athletic ability is seen as culturally valuable in the school, the student may see herself as embodying that value in social and personal ways. Inversely, if a student’s (dis)ability is seen as a problem, herself and social image may be affected (Valente, 2011). How students of color negotiate schooling is therefore a question of how they negotiate their ways of knowing as students that reify, resist, and complicate school norms and values.

Here the term ways of being is being used interchangeably with ontology. Given the dialogues around ontology in scholarship (e.g., Badiou, 2007; Deleuze, 1995; Gilroy, 2000; Hamilakis, 2014; Heidegger, 1962; Massumi, 2002; Mills, 1998), this may seem like a logical step. However, it is significant to note that historical scholars of color do not use the term “ontology” to signify questions of being (e.g., Cooper, 1892; DuBois
1903/1940; Truth, 1851; Woodson, 1933). Further, few imply a separation between ways of knowing and being. This historical lens asks the question, how is knowing nested in rather than separate from being? And, inversely, how does being firmly affect knowing? In addition, the term “ontology” seems firmly rooted in White scholars’ constructions of the idea. In other words, to what ends have constructions of being been shaped (un)intentionally by wider questions of power and race?

One way schooling preserves these values is by privileging student ways of knowing above their ways of being. An example of this is the current emphasis on testing in schools. Why understand who a student is when what they know can be either celebrated or reduced to testing accomplishments? In these cases, even student ways of knowing are minimized to particular ways to demonstrate knowledge. Further, these demonstrations of knowledge, such as IQ tests, were designed with the goal of marginalizing students of color (Winfield, 2007). This creates spaces where schools buttress the exploration of student epistemological questions rather than ontological underpinnings (Michie, 2009; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). In the case of students of color, while these structures tend to overlook general ways of being, they also consistently devalue the epistemologies and ontologies of students of color (DuBois, 1903; Michie, 2009). If knowing is valued above being and Anglo epistemologies are valued above those of students of color then student of color being is placed low on the list of important ideas and ideals in schools.

Attending to these constant diminutions of being is significant for at least the following reasons. First, it is important to note that the placed subordinate value on the
ontologies of students of color means they are given a particular kind of in-attention. This does not mean that students of color somehow avoid being noticed in school places and spaces. However, what is often seen is an ideal of “Blackness,” a placed social ontology (Mills, 1998) that is predetermined through history, politics, and sociocultural values. As a social ontology refers to a way of being that is socially constructed through exclusivist contracts that shape ideas and ideals about individuals and groups, student of color ontologies become placed through sociocultural norms and values both in and out of institutional contexts. Therefore, what is missed is often the ways of being that are perceived as “White” as they do not fit into socially defined notions of “acting Black.” However, it is important to note that although Mills (1998) outlined an important theory of sociocultural values and ontology, he often missed questions of gender, sexual orientation, and ability for questions of race. Certainly it is not impossible for a child to be both Black and female. It is further possible for the same child to be gay. Do those parts of the individual not face social exclusion from sociocultural norms as well? In other words, what parts of one’s social ontology are missed when race is the only way of being Othered that is considered?

Second, attending to these social ontologies foregrounds schooling as a site of racialization, eugenics, and hegemony that have been deeply embedded into current school structures (Winfield, 2007; Woodson, 1933). Schooling as a mechanism that propagates the image of a child’s “black face as a curse” (Woodson, 1933, p. 3) is not a historical event that has resolved. Rather, the roots of contemporary schooling are firmly entrenched in a foundation of exclusionist ideals (Winfield, 2007). This is problematic
from, for example, the eugenicist perspective, acknowledging rooted structures of racialization means recognizing a lack of understanding or knowing about non-dominant ways of being. Knowing about the Other in ways that interrupts the narrative of “Black as subordinate” potentially inverts current educational contexts (Winfield, 2007). This is because it breaks the aforementioned social ontologies and normalized ways of knowing the Other and one’s self. It is the lack of knowing that sustains “social, political and cultural orderings of the races effected in keeping with this [social] ontology” (Outlaw, 2007, p. 198). Social ontologies are therefore reified through an (un)intentional absence of attention to the way students of color “be” in schools. It is important to note that such social ontologies embedded within the curriculum are also harmful to Anglo students as they become indoctrinated into privileged ways of knowing and identities (Outlaw, 2007).

Finally, scholarship that has offered strong dialogues that unpack the ontological, either specifically with regards to race (DuBois, 1903/1940; Gilroy, 2000; Mills, 1998) or within broader constructions (Badiou, 2007; Deleuze, 1995; Heidegger, 1962), often miss the intersection of ontology and affect. This is not to say that affect is completely absent from discussions on ontology. For example, while sensory studies scholars are not necessarily explicit about such intersections of being and feeling, dialogues about sensation, signification, and being are certainly present (see, for example, Hamilakis, 2014; Ortner, 2006; Tsing, 2005). Though, even the within the presence of this dialogue in the sensory studies field, an absence of race still exists (Gershon, 2011). Toward that
end, what stories are not heard when race reflected at the intersection of affect and ontology?

People are always in a state of becoming (Massumi, 2002), an ebb and flow that is part of the rhythm of being. Similarly, affect resides in the *in-between* that resonates “about [and] between . . . sometimes sticking to bodies and worlds” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1). Affect here is used in the sense of a *force or forces of encounter* (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010) that is incorporeal in nature but grounded in material consequences (Massumi, 2002). From this lens, affect is about words and actions, both intentional and unintentional (Wozolek, 2015). Within the intersection of affect and ontology, these actions bring the theoretical to collide with and between bodies. Missing the affective connections between people and things potentially forgets the material nature of affect and its effect on one’s way of being. This absence becomes the “rhythm without the readiness to arrive and relay in certain ways” (Massumi, 2002, p. 20). Affect must therefore be met with intent to facilitate the mental health and well-being of children (Apple, 2006; MacLeod, 2008; McLeod, 1992; Sedgwick, 2003). When affect is not a felt part of the material and ontological, how much of a child’s well-being is reflected in schools?

**Knowing Power, Being Friction**

An in-attention to students and in particular the ontology of students of color, strongly affects individuals as well as broader school culture (DuBois, 1903; de Lissovoy, 2012). For, just as an individual’s being can be overlooked and affected by social ontology, the normalized ideas and ideals of and about a group can be rendered static by
the same overarching ontological ceiling (Mills, 1998). In schools, the hidden curriculum, or the underlying culture of norms, values, and beliefs that are taught in and through school ecologies (Apple, 1971; Giroux & Penna, 1983; Jackson, 1968), is fundamental to the reproduction and normalization of racialized ideals in school culture (de Lissovoy, 2012). This means that when students learn about themselves and others through the culture of a school and that culture is innately racialized, ideas and ideals about race are reproduced daily through simply being a part of the school’s culture. Through schooling, the hidden curriculum often serves to name, know, and organize identities (de Lissovoy, 2012). Within the hidden curriculum, these identities are often named through resonance or dissonance with an individual’s cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). To be clear, the hidden curriculum has over time been conceptualized by several dialogues (e.g., Counts, 1932; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Giroux & Penna, 1983; Haralambos, 1991; Jackson, 1968; de Lissovoy, 2012; Meighan, 1981). Therefore as it is relevant to this study, the hidden curriculum will be understood through the lineage of Jackson’s (1968) argument that the hidden curriculum is part of education as a socialization process. Further, it is understood that the hidden curriculum also functions to reinscribe hegemonic forms of schooling and broader dominant cultural orientations (Anyon, 2000; Apple, 1971; Esposito, 2011; Giroux & Penna, 1983). As a mechanism of hegemonic socialization, the hidden curriculum functions to shape the practices, perspectives, and values of students through schooling. While some scholars have argued that the hidden curriculum is solely an ecological production that manifests outside of the classroom (Haralambos, 1991; Meighan, 1981), this study recognizes that the hidden
curriculum, like other curricular forms, are constantly in play at schools and are not bound by place. Here, a student’s capital is culturally identified through her social assets that support social mobility and agency. How a student moves through schooling, or is rendered immobile, often resides in her ability to negotiate her capital and surrounding culture(s).

As a student (re)negotiates capital, her being is constantly in a state of friction with her identity, how she is identified and broader cultural norms and values. The concept of “friction,” as conceptualized by Tsing (2005), is crucial to understanding the relationships and ecologies of schools because within this concept one can explore how friction can be used for both positive and negative change for people and places. In her ethnography, Tsing (2005) argued that globalization produces friction rather than cultural clashes. She wrote that

A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere . . . As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power. (Tsing, 2005, p. 5)

In the context of schooling power structures, while unequal and formed with the intent to maintain the status quo, also create friction by being in contact with Others and their agency. Further, as Tsing (2005) reminded us, “how we run depends on what shoes we have to run in” (p. 5). Schools as they are both moved and shaped by friction, which is interaction in defining movement, cultural form and agency, are also “inflected by historical trajectories, enabling, excluding and particularizing” (Tsing, 2005, p. 6).
Therefore, through friction one can dialogue about such topics as the interconnections of history, culture, politics, agency, power and schools. The web of culture (Geertz, 1973) can be both made and destroyed by friction.

As further explicated below, because culture is so intricately nuanced and complex, it is worth temporarily teasing away this concept from other facets of school in order to engage in a dialogue of its significance for students of color and broader structures of schooling. At one level, “culture” is often placed as a substitute for “race” (Visweswaran, 2010). This is significant as present forms of culture are often ordered by collective historical memories (Berry, 2010; Marable, 2000; Swartz, 1992; Winfield, 2007). As briefly noted above, collective memories are historical ideas and ideals that are entrenched in one’s way of being and knowing. Inversely, historical descriptions are frequently organized by present states of knowing (Lentin, 2005; Visweswaran, 2010). This means that while, on one hand, our present actions are in many ways determined by history, how we remember history is often ordered by our present epistemological understandings. Further complicating these recursions in the history of the present (Foucault, 1977) is the notion that “displacements in fields of knowledge and power that occur when race decenters or dislodges culture” (Visweswaran, 2010, p. 3). In other words, while culture is often used as a synonym for race, questions of race also have the mobility to displace ideas and ideals of culture.

The multiple forms, complexities, and underlying characteristics that groups use to organize their meanings of “culture” can make defining the term difficult (Williams, 1981). Additionally, because defining culture often means creating a lens through which
the lived experiences of Others is analyzed (Geertz; 1973; E. T. Hall, 1977; Marable, 2000; Visweswaran, 2010), it is used here with fluidity and the understanding that even the best definition of culture is always made intricate by questions of place, space and the experiences of those living in and those observing any given context (Rosaldo, 1993).

Further, as detailed in the next chapter, within the history the anthropological pursuit defining and describing culture, there is a history of Othering. The definition here is fluid to avoid such a recursion in this work, knowing that the very act of researching and recording culture has the potential to be inherently othering in its process and product.

Attending to its multifaceted nature, culture is broadly defined here through two distinct yet overlapping lenses, those of semiotics and utilizing a socio-historical perspective. Semiotically, culture can be understood as “webs of significance” that, while created by people, also suspend those individuals and groups connected to these webs of understandings (Geertz, 1973, p. 4). These webs are inherited concepts through which people “communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). This web is important because the way we “create and understand the sensory world” is shaped by culture (Howes & Classen, 2014, p. 10). For example, not only how but also how much we see is shaped by culture (Howes & Classen, 2014). Similarly, what is heard and how it is perceived is often shaped by cultural contexts and understandings of these webs of significance. In sum, while thinking about how students of color negotiate and order their experiences in schools, an understanding of these symbols and how they function becomes essential.
In many ways advancing Geertz’s model, as its name suggests, a socio-historical lens focuses on culture as a “social and historical creation to be explained, not given as a natural fact” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 4). As further detailed later in this chapter, place, space, and cultural forms are often imposed, invented, reworked, and transformed as a result of political and historical processes (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Helfenbein, 2010). In this way, the webs of significance become sites of difference and contestation. To be clear, culture(s) do share common ground and disregarding in-group cohesiveness may inadvertently take away group agency for deciding individual and group identity. However, the ways in which symbols gain significance and become iterative is inherently a process of power and history (Bourdieu, 1993; Foucault, 1977; Geertz, 1973; Goffman, 1961; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Visweswaran, 2010). The intersection of these cultural definitions is designed to attend specifically to the tension of cultural being that is, in one way, the result of intentional political practices created by (in)attention to differences and, in another, common ways of knowing and being as decided by a group. This means that how one sees and defines a culture is in part historical and political and in part determined by individual and group agency (Ortner, 2006).

On such example of group agency can be found in the idea of signifyin(g) (Gates, 1988). Gates argued that signifyin(g) is a trope through which an individual may focus her anger or frustration into a relatively safe exchange. It at once can signal the gap between denotative and figurative meanings of words while establishing masculinity/femininity and agency. While the art of signifyin(g) is often thought of as a verbal or written exchange, it can also extend beyond the written word to art, music, and
one’s daily life. It can also elucidate particular versions of African American history through African Americans (see, for example, Caponi, 1999). Here the symbols of significance formed through culture are often flipped or function to “affirm, critique, or build community through the involvement of its participants” (Boyce Davies, 2008, p. 842). What happens when a symbol is flipped to fit another’s worldview? Is its significance lost or strengthened by the art of signifyin(g)?

Societies use the symbols found in these webs of significance to express their “worldview, value-orientation, ethos and other cultural aspects” (Ortner, 1984, p. 129). In other words, symbols become the vehicles of culture (Geertz, 1973) through which local actors see, feel, think, and act in their world. The significance of symbols under Geertz’s (1973) theory is therefore not just in interpreting cultural symbols but also understanding how they function in broader sociocultural interactions and perhaps how these interactions function in the subsequent iterations of culture. As culture influences an individual’s actions and outlook and, inversely, one’s being often play into the reification of symbols, culture becomes inherently and performatively public (Geertz, 1973). However, a tension can develop with culture’s multifaceted interpretations and understandings and culture as “public,” in a singular form. Therefore, as webs of significance are socially constructed, culture should also be seen as “publics,” in a continuous plural rather than the singular.

Perhaps more importantly, while culture itself may be public, the rules are not necessarily as explicit, particularly for traditionally marginalized populations (Delpit, 1995; Jackson, 1968; Woodson, 1933). It is through gaining access to these rules that an
individual may develop an understanding of socially appropriate actions and reactions, allowing her to decide how to traverse spaces and places (Delpit, 1995; Tatum, 2003). Additionally, through knowledge and understanding of these rules, an individual can potentially gain access to parts of society from which she was previously excluded. An example of this social movement is found in an extension of Geertz’s image of distinguishing a wink, blink, or a parody of a wink. In Geertz’s description, these gestures contain socially established codes that produce a “stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures” (Geertz, 1973, p. 7). Expanding Geertz’s work to Delpit’s (1995) discussion on a culture of power means that if a person is winked at in one culture, the practice of winking itself or the signification behind the wink may have cultural variance but the rules that underlie a culturally appropriate response to that gesture is not necessarily public and has to be learned (Delpit, 1995). Understanding the complexity of school culture and the underlying rules therefore goes beyond seeing the parts of schooling as a windmill which has separate parts that intersect at a point but rather as a “knot in a web of practices that stretch into complex systems beginning and ending outside the classroom and the school” (Nespor, 1997, p. xiii).

As local actors shape their ways of being in a web of cultural symbols and come to know the explicit rules that influence their actions, it is important to note how questions of power and agency plays into cultural understandings. While these understandings are often shaped cultural rules, as a local actor traverses this metaphorical web of significance, she also is involved in spinning and reifying the values of the culture. Additionally, though the image of a web is helpful in understanding how people
are constantly at play with and surrounded by culture, the image of being “suspended” in the web is inherently static. Geertz’s critics often argue similar points, writing that his cultural theories lacked discourse on questions of power and, though to a lesser extent, subjectivity and agency (e.g., Herbert, 1991; Ortner, 1999; Shankman et al., 1984; Springs, 2008). Similarly, it could be argued that socio-political cultural lenses (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997) discuss power but miss questions of individual agency. This is done through the discussion of historical facets that build contemporary structures without explicitly discussing how individuals enacted agency within that history. While both power and agency are employed here and from a strong foundational definition of “culture,” it is important to further complicate these ideas in order to explicate questions of power and agency as they relate to culture.

Power and agency play both into and against each other as culture is enacted in, through, and between local actors. As local actors utilize the symbols to express their “worldview, value-orientation, ethos and other aspects of culture” (Ortner, 1984, p. 129), sociocultural norms and values are created. These nomos, or cultural habits, underpin cultural fields (Bourdieu, 1993) where local actors and social positions are at play. Bourdieu (1993) used the term fields as a way to discuss a sociocultural arena where the interaction of local actors with factors such as social norms and values, habitus and an individual’s capital help to determine power relationships. Additionally, he used the term habitus to discuss the normalized values that local actors often do not see or consider as an underlying factor in these structures as they are historically molded in one’s epistemological cultural and social views. These fields not only have power at play
within them but also interact with other sociocultural fields to enact structures that work toward and against certain forms of cultural capital.

While the image of a field may seem inherently static, culture is not a bounded set of social interactions constituting a social space; it is a fluid set of exchanges that shape not only group interactions but world systems as cultural concepts are built, practiced, interpreted and disseminated (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Marcus, 1998; Visweswaran, 2010). As the tangled web of symbols in a culture come into play on the fields, culture becomes publicly enacted. Enacted culture, whether implicit or explicit, is not just found in the symbols, inherited concepts and sets of understandings in and between groups but is also moved through the (re)articulation of those parts. In schools, one example of this (re)articulation through interaction is found in the enacted curriculum where local actors negotiate meaning through sociocultural contexts and interactions (Gershon, 2013a; Page, 1991; Schwab, 1969).

While several encounters in schooling exist within a structure of power, for example teacher to student, it is important to consider the scale of schools and culture (Helfenbein, 2004). Through local actors the curriculum is always “in action” within micro and macro interactions. The “enactment” then is what is learned and enacted through and between people that is always “nested and emergent and [with] boundaries [that] are both fluid and porous” (Gershon, 2013b, p. 24). Because the enacted curriculum is shared through encounters, where “self and other emerge ‘with’ one another, where the ‘with’ constitutes embodiment as difference” (Springgay & Freedman, 2009, p. 32), the enacted curriculum is embodied in the action of local actors.
While overarching power structures largely determine how and which symbols are articulated and iterated, individuals have agency to participate in and against broader sociocultural structures (Ortner, 2006). On one hand, the sociocultural power structures at play in fields both inform actions and become embodied in local actors way of knowing and being (Bourdieu, 1993; Navarro, 2006; Wacquant, 2005). However, while habitus and fields engender recursive structures that preclude an outside of power (Foucault, 1978), local actors’ subjectivities generate foundations for agency (Ortner, 2005).

While power is ubiquitous, local actors are always at least partially “knowing subjects” (Giddens, 1979; Ortner, 2005). Without understanding how subjects experience power, it is difficult to understand how they (re)act within these structures (Kruks, 2001; Mahoney & Yngvesson, 1992). As subjects work with/in these structures, they carry with them their own set of subjectivities. Subjectivity is used here as a form of social consciousness that supports the knowing, perceptions, affect and being of the acting subject (Freire, 1970; Lather, 2003; M. A. McLaren, 2012; Ortner, 2005). This consciousness becomes the basis from which subjects enact agency, acting on the world even as they are acted upon (Ortner, 2005). It is important to note, however, that the relationship between agency and subjectivity is fluid. Meaning that reflecting on one’s agency can necessitate broader social consciousness.

Space and Place in School: Hegemonic Historical Creations

According to Tuan (1977), it is the (re)creation of culture, and local actor’s subsequent experiences within cultural forms that contribute to the formation of space
and place. Without the daily enactment of culture and experiences in conjunction with that culture, a space or place would not exist in its current iteration. Space and place therefore have a presence of both historical and contemporary narratives. Similarly, schools, like many places studied by ethnographers, are not blank pages that are filled by the narratives of those currently living the experience. Nor are students marginalized solely through current contexts. A child’s experience, either positive or negative, is rooted in these historical and current contexts of schooling. Therefore, rather than ahistorical structures, schools are better thought of as a point of suture, formed by history and politics (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Helfenbein & Huddleston, 2013; Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991).

Because the formation of space and place are tied to culture, history, and current experience, separating them causes a false split among them and the factors that contribute to their formation. However, much like the above discussion on culture, they will be temporarily teased apart here for analysis in order to explicitly focus on the historical and political factors that have impacted and created the normalized structures and interactions in schooling. Much like administering tests whose purpose were originally designed by eugenicists to determine intelligence in today’s context without discussing the historical roots of the test, normalized historical and political factors have normalized hegemonic values that keep the status quo in schools. This is not to say that other factors do not contribute to the formation of space and place. Rather, it is using the historical and political background of schools as a point of departure to talk about the current context of schooling that students of color negotiate daily. This point of
departure is important because it is the point from which communities are formed, identities are shaped and identification, differences and deficits were designed (Hendry, 2011; King, 2006; Winfield, 2007).

Place can be made by boundaries and boarders and is resonated in local communities that fill place with meaning (Helfenbein, 2010). It is a local, political, historical, and cultural negotiation (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Helfenbein, 2010; Soja, 1989). Place is a fluid process, changed by the local actors who interact with and experience place (Massey, 2005). As Helfenbein (2010) argued, the context of place in schools is a set rhizomatic interactions of curriculum, politics, agency, power, structure, and meaning. A tangled web of practices that too often marginalizes students of color within the constant “nightmare of the present” (Pinar, 2004) in schools. When place is a process, something made rather than incidentally formed, the places and spaces that students of color negotiate can be understood as a margin that is a purposefully designed and designated position (Massey, 2005; Soja, 1989). By foregrounding schooling in hierarchical power relations, pulled together by a particular history, the “processes by which space achieves a distinctive identity as a place” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 36) can be understood. This is significant for at least the following reasons. First, the identity of a place is crucial to the communities that interact within them. The intersection of community interaction and the history of the context that has formed a place, like schools, drive the power relations at play (Bourdieu, 1993). In other words, to understand the power relations between communities and group members, it is essential to understand the processes of place-making for the context. As Ortner (2006) argued,
the ideas and ideals about power ranges from Foucault’s (1978) theory that there is no outside of power to models of resistance like James Scott’s (1985) argument that draws on the pervasive, everyday forms of resistance within socio-political structures. As stated in the next chapter, power is pervasive but local actor agency within field holds possibilities for local actor resistance and resilience. Because local actors have agency, they have power both in and between groups and fields as they engage and interact. As place is partially made by local actors in current contexts, individual and group agency to engage with power structures is crucial to structure of places.

Second, attending to questions of place in schools as a process of place making, diaspora, historical amnesia, and the economies of racism that enforce oppression in schools (Brown & Brown, 2010; de Lissovoy, 2012) foregrounds race as an integral stitch in the context rather than an adjacent issue of education. In other words, how has “where we are” as a place with its own identity shaped “what we are” (Helfenbein, 2004) in terms of racism that permeates the spaces of schooling? Finally, the extension of the idea that place-making is an active and intentional process supports the idea that the identity of an individual, community, and culture is predicated on understanding not only the resonances but also the dissonance (Gershon, 2012) of one’s identities.

Another way that students’ negotiation of space and place in schools can be understood is through Goffman’s (1961) lens of “the underlife” of institutions. Goffman’s analysis is a helpful lens for examining students of color in this study for the following two reasons. First, the underlife of institutions are in no small part comprised of safe spaces that those with the least amount of political power carve out in and around
institutional processes and rules. Second, because such safe spaces exist within, around, and between the boundaries of institutional rules and processes, they can coexist within the broader framework that oppress those with less power yet allow the safe spaces they make to overlooked by those with more power within the institution.

In exploring the “where” of schooling, one will necessarily become tangled in the “what” and “who,” the interactions that distinctly shape space (Taylor, 2009). This is because the creation of space is braided by sociocultural ideas and ideals of history, politics, and the multiplicity of co-constructed interrelations (MacLeod, 2008; Massey, 2005; Michie, 2009). The intricate connection between space and place is significant in explicating the normalized structures and interactions in schooling (Nespor, 1997; Taylor, 2009). As place generates images of one’s place in the world, for example, it is interrelated with concepts of space as it can be a product of geographical location and ontological resonance that is attached to community (Gershon, 2013b; Massey, 1993; Wozolek, 2012). Similarly, space can engender ideas of resistance and resilience (Helfenbein, 2010) a space that gives freedom to or freedom from (Greene, 1988) homogeneity in a particular place. However, schooling tends to focus on places rather than spaces. For example, schools often tout that they are a good place to learn but rarely discuss creating an inclusive space for learning. Even when safe spaces are included in district rhetoric, it often plays directly against the participants’ everyday lives and experiences (Apple, 1993; Tatum, 2003; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Yet, without the plurality of interrelated trajectories and interactions (Massey, 2005), without space, can a “good” place for learning exist?
While spaces that allow room for the ways of being and knowing of students of color are significantly absent (Tatum, 2003), what is present is a pervasive, deliberate history of racism in schooling. The political and historical structures of schooling have been constructed, reified, and reiterated through several place-making processes. First, there are particular discourses which have been silenced in implicit and explicit ways. Implicitly, texts written and schools built to contribute to the curricular support of the epistemologies of students of color were not legitimatized by the dominant paradigms (Brown & Brown, 2010; Elmore & Skyes, 1992; Gordon, 1993). By negating the curricular ideas and ideals of the Other, hegemonic influences were upheld by “defining what is legitimate knowledge and by controlling access to it” (Elmore & Skyes, 1992, p. 195). Explicitly, the eugenicists known today as the “fathers of education,” such as Thorndike, Charters, and Bobbitt, formed curricular ideals and tests that supported Othering in a way that ensured control of the “inferior blood . . . of the worm eaten stock” (Winfield, 2007, p. 6). The stitching of these historical and political structures into what has become the fabric of contemporary schooling has provided the foundation of the hidden curriculum. As the hidden curriculum transmits cultural norms and values in schools (Giroux & Penna, 1983; Vallance, 1983), it translates this “official knowledge” (Apple, 1999) into the everyday being and knowing in schools. In this case, as Apple (1999) argue, official knowledge especially pertain to “class and race struggles over culture and power that organize[d] and reorganize[d]” (p. xii) the epistemology of institutions and communities. The consistent negation of these particular discourses has significantly contributed to the historical suture of place in schooling. This is because it
lays the foundation for the lesson that a student’s “Black face is a curse” (Woodson, 1933, p. 3), that a curricular model constructed for his way of being is irrelevant—the first knot in the noose tied against students of color in schools.

Second, while curriculum studies has paid close attention to lines of power (cf, Apple, 2006; P. McLaren, 2002; Pinar, 1975), the field itself has generally overlooked the contributions of scholars of color in its historical reconstruction of the field (Berry, 2010; Brown & Brown, 2010; Cooper, 1892; Milner, 2008; Woodson, 1933). For example, several influential curriculum studies historical handbooks have either missed or marginalized questions of race by largely leaving out scholars of color in the field as significant figures that are integral to its historical roots (cf, Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Schubert, 1986; Schubert, Lopez Schubert, Thomas, & Carroll, 2002). Just as the null curriculum reifies sociocultural norms and values by explicitly not teaching certain topics, the null curriculum of curriculum theory’s historical roots can serve to reinscribe hegemonic ideas and ideals. Theory strongly informs everyday practice, as it is the ideas and ideals that shape individual and group’s choices and actions (Berry, 2010; P. McLaren, 2002). It is therefore important to attend to this relationship because, as Rothberg (2004) noted, how we respond to the current moment is dependent on our remembered past. How will attending to students of color in the current context of schooling resonate deeply across the field when the voices of scholars of color have been so largely left out? Perhaps more importantly, the narratives of these students should not be positioned within the diaspora of scholarly voices of color in curriculum studies.
Rather they should be understood to align with and contribute to the rich historical roots of scholars whose perspectives enrich questions of power, agency and resistance.

Finally, the consistent reification of marginalization in schooling through the practice of leaving out voices of color has created a cultural sense of historical amnesia for “what was.” These memories are replaced by a habitus for the naturalized ideals of “what is” (Berry, 2010; Gordon, 1993; E. T. Hall, 1977). This amnesia serves as the canvas on which the hidden and null curricula are painted. The hidden curriculum, which is often the unspoken cultural transmission of norms and values in schools (Giroux & Penna, 1983; Vallance, 1983), is formed by and reified through its historical roots (Boykin, 2005). In sum, when both historical and contemporary ways of being of students of color are at best viewed as insignificant and at worst considered a problem to be managed, over time a collective memory (Winfield, 2007) of a Black ontological nuisance is formed.

This perception pervades the structures of schooling, complicating the places and spaces that students of color currently negotiate (Cooper, 1892; DuBois, 1903; Helfenbein, 2010; Nespor, 1997; Woodson, 1933). On the other hand, the curricula and contexts formed for students of color by scholars of color has been largely negated (Brown, 2010; Gordon, 1997). As Brown (2010) argued, scholars like Woodson created a textbook series that attended to African American accomplishments as well as ways of knowing and being that was nationally whitewashed with a curriculum that reduces the experiences African Americans to that of historical slaves and contemporary urban hindrances. As such, it is perhaps no surprise that what is systematically not addressed,
in part due to habitus and in part due to choice, becomes a notable presence in today’s null curriculum (Eisner, 1985; Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986). From the historical and political place-making of schools, when there is an absence of ontological and epistemological pride for students of color, there is a presence of difference, of Othering. Therefore the formal curriculum, the intended knowledge students receive (Apple, 1993; Page, 2000), is always affected not only by an educator’s explicit intent but also by what she implicitly misses teaching.

While historical and political marginalization have caused notable forms of racial absence in schooling and the field of curriculum studies, it is equally important to recognize that racial discourse does have a current and consistent presence in the field. Further, it is crucial to recognize that participation in this discourse is not bound by race and has received significant contributions by Anglo scholars (e.g., Apple, 2006; MacLeod, 2008; Pinar, 1993; Sleeter, 2011; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Weis & Fine, 1992).

However, dialogues in African American intellectual traditions as they relate to curriculum studies most often attend to a corrective rather than collective memory (Marable, 2000; Swartz, 1992). For example, just as particular curricular and scholarly historical lines have been truncated, they have also been enunciated and (re)drawn within the African American intellectual traditions (e.g., Gates, 1992; Gordon, 1993; Grant & Millar, 2005; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; King, 2006; Marable, 2000). Using a critical lens that attends to the multiplicities of perspective, it is important to remember that these traditions are complicated by the intersection where the ideas of wisdom meet ideals of
intellect. In relation to curriculum studies, this intersection pushes at the question, “What knowledge is of most worth?” (Spencer, 1859).

Spencer’s (1859) question not only asks what knowledge is of most worth but it also can be used to attend to whose knowledge is considered relevant, a question that also pushes at who decides the value of knowledge. It is therefore important to point out that even within the existence of African American intellectual traditions, there are several absences within the presence. A salient example of this absence is found in the marginalization of African American women’s voices from these histories (Berry, 1982; Evans, 2008; Guadalupe Davidson, Gines, & Marcano, 2010; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1994; Hendry, 2011). In other words, in an intellectual tradition that honors the emancipatory possibilities of multiple perspectives, how is the work of women like Ana Julia Cooper, Mary Jane McLeod Bethune, Hallie Brown, Barbara Sizemore, Angela Davis, and Constance Baker Motley often missed for male scholars like W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson? This creates a context where women of color are missed twice—once for race and again for gender. Additionally, despite these considerable absences, it is important to note the historical gaps in scholarship that exist both in and between groups that strongly contribute to contemporary school structures.

In sum, aside from the exclusion of particular voices, significant apertures in the work of those voices most heard in the field also exist. This is important for at least the following reasons. First, it enunciates a particular attention dominant ideas and ideals. For example, both DuBois and Dewey conceptualize curricular forms that emphasize art and the aesthetic (e.g., Dewey, 1934; DuBois, 1926). Further, both scholars complicate
the normalization of sociocultural values through schooling (Dewey, 1938; DuBois, 1903). Yet, although both men discuss race, it has been argued that Dewey’s scholarship is subtly racialized in its discussion on pedagogical aims for students of color (Eldridge, 2010; Fallace, 2009; Margonis, 2009; Neubart, 2010; Sullivan, 2004). However, as is often glossed in the literature, Dewey and DuBois are quite similar in the absence of attention to questions of gender in their discussions of educational equity. What does it mean when women are left out both in and between groups of educational theorists? Furthermore, while Dewey and DuBois draw on similar lines of inquiry that is crucial to the field, whose voice ultimately receives attention in the curriculum studies community?

Second, attending to such gaps draws attention to the differences between scholars who write about curriculum (e.g., Dewey and DuBois) and those who wrote curriculum, as was the case for both the textbooks written by Carter G. Woodson and George Counts. Along similar lines, while both Woodson and Counts attend to questions of class in their curricula (e.g., Counts, 1932; Woodson, 1922, 1933, 1936, 1939), Counts does not strongly attend to questions of race. Like DuBois and Dewey, Counts and Woodson also miss questions of gender in their written curriculum. This is important because within these historical lines that form our collective memory (Winfield, 2007) in and about school structures, the written curricular work from women of color is consistently absent. While scholars like Anna Julia Cooper (1892) wrote congruent scholarship to Dewey and DuBois, there is little record of written curricular models by women of color. Finally, while there has certainly been growing attention to women’s historical contributions to the field of curriculum studies (e.g., Hendry, 2011), race
remains largely from such conversations. What does it mean when the central models for equity and access in education leave out large groups of marginalized people? How does this shape the contemporary experience for female students of color? In sum, this creates a context in which people of color are absent from many historical curriculum studies conversations. Such conversations tend not to focus on men of color and those that do often do not attend to questions of gender in spite of strong scholarship by contemporary women of color.

Third, it is important to note that in group differences of curricular ideas and ideals were vast among the African American intellectual tradition. For example, scholars and teachers like Mary McLeod Bethune and Booker T. Washington argued for and put into practice models of education that fold well into contemporary standardization and eugenics movements by ascribing a particular role to African Americans through schooling. While the educational model proposed by Washington, and followed by educators like Bethune, certainly can be helpful in particular contexts, historically it upheld “caste distinctions, and [opposed] the higher training and ambition of our brightest minds” (DuBois, 1903, p. 35). It is therefore significant that such models have not received as much attention in recent standardized paradigms. Though its absence is, perhaps, yet another vestige of race in curriculum.

Finally, questions of sexual orientation and ability are notably absent within these intellectual traditions (D. M. Hall & Jagose, 2012; Quinn & Meiners, 2009). It would therefore seem that within the questions of race in curriculum and education there is an absence of gender. Further, within the question of gender, there is an absence of ability
and sexual orientation. In short, where is the complex multiplicity of an embodied self in a field where even traditionally marginalized populations maintained siloed pluralities?

From another perspective this could be seen as a null curriculum of both gender and race.

**The Presence of Absence**

Students of color are excluded not only through their contemporary contexts but also through history as it has formed structures and molded collective memories (Winfield, 2007). These historical sets of exclusion raise the following question “what is the presence of absence?” in order to elucidates several critical points for this study. First, it examines the multiple voices that are absent from curriculum studies as a field and complicates this silence by attending to in-group difference within the scholarship designed to correct that absence. Second, it questions the ways in which schooling tends to place students of color in the role of the consistently present strangers, a role played out in the spaces and places that they negotiate daily (Tatum, 2003). Inversely, exploring the presence of absence also informs how a socially pejorative presence impacts students of color.

For example, when a group’s differences have historically constructed ties to deficits (Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Winfield, 2007), their presence of being is often seen through a lens of problematic deficit. It is through this lens of difference that the Other is formed (Butler, 2010; Delpit, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Conversely, it is when these differences serve as disruption, as a kind of friction to sociocultural norms and values (Tsing, 2005), that questions of agency are germinated. In this case, what
kind of emancipatory presence can students of color create in spaces that are socially constructed for their ways of being and knowing to be absent?

As students of color negotiate the tensions between their ways of being and knowing with dominant sociocultural norms and values in schools, they often test their cultural toolkit (Swidler, 2001) that informs their actions in schooling. Despite ontological or epistemological resonance or dissonance, the tools a student acquires in the toolkit contextually shapes the repertoire of habits, skills, and actions of an individual, determining the long term survival of particular cultural ideologies (Swidler, 1986).

Students are then positioned to use tools that do not necessarily fit all students. Given that cultural toolkits are built for Anglo, ways of being and knowing, their use by students of color contributes to their marginalization. Similarly, the toolkit also fails students who may superficially appear to fit with dominant cultural constructions but whose is-ness resonates with other ways of being (Gershon, 2013b). As such, this argument is nuanced by questions of race, class, gender, sexual orientation as well as overarching questions of resonance and dissonance with dominant paradigms. However, it also important to remember that due to its narrow construction that conforms to dominant norms and values, the toolkit itself is inherently marginalizing.

Negotiating these ideologies is a matter of following a set of cultural rules that are determined by a culture of power (Delpit, 1995). However, as Delpit argued, without an informant to explicitly explain the rules of the culture of power, it is difficult for marginalized individuals to fully operate within a hegemonic structure. Therefore, how does an individual negotiate schooling if the tools they are given does not resonate with
their ways of being and the rules are not made explicit to their ways of knowing? In other words, what intended absences do students of color have in their repertoire to negotiate the culture of schooling that are as intentionally present for Anglo students?

Ideologies of schooling extend from the classroom to the corridors (Metz, 1978), creating multiple places, spaces, rules and cultures for students to negotiate (Nespor, 1997). Just as pedagogy spills from the classroom to the streets, music, media and literature (Dimitriadis, 2009; Pinar, 2010), curricular forms also “maintain dominant practices while offering spaces for critique and reimagination” (Sandlin, Schultz & Burdick, 2010, p. 1) outside of the classroom. Teacher, student, curricula, classroom, and corridor: These are all spaces and places that inform each other, each part of the knot of schooling (Nespor, 1997). So what counts as pedagogy? Who validates the formal, the intended, curriculum? Who has the power to enact a curriculum?

Because schools, along with classrooms, are places where curricula become public pedagogies (Giroux, 2004; Sandlin et al., 2010) carried out by many local actors, they become places of constantly emergent experiences (Dewey, 1938; Nespor, 1997). However, it should be noted that all pedagogy is public and not tied to the institution in ways that are without community or culture. Additionally, although it is not explicitly addressed here, an issue with the idea of public pedagogy is that it, like much of curriculum studies history, largely ignores scholars like DuBois, Truth, Cooper, and Woodson who address questions of pedagogy being publicly enacted both in and outside of institutional settings. The formal curriculum is therefore not aligned with intentionally organized knowledge delivered through texts, assignments and lessons (Gershon, 2013a;
Jackson, 1968; Lesko, 1988; Page, 1991; Snyder, 1970), rather it is intentionally
organized knowledge passed through contextualized interactions. Because the hidden
curriculum underpins sociocultural spaces in schools, this intended knowledge can
become iterative lessons of cultural norms and values. This again raises the question,
*what is the presence of absence?* Whose voices are present in curricular conversations,
not solely as they exist in texts but as they exist in the corridors? What lessons are
present in those non-classroom in-school places? How can curriculum become
formalized or deconstructed through those most absent from institutional or scholarly
curriculum conversations? Perhaps most importantly, what does it mean as students of
color apply the cultural toolkits they are given and the rules of schooling to the curricula
and public pedagogy in which they participate?

If a cultural toolkit does not resonate with the student and the rules of the culture
of power are often not negotiated with positive outcomes for the student, what forms of
negotiation does the student use to traverse the space of schooling? One such form of
negotiation is found in signifyin(g). As noted above, literature within the African
American intellectual tradition often uses signifyin(g) (Gates, 1988) as a wordplay
strategy to elucidate particular versions of African American history through connotative
language (e.g., Baker, 1980; Hurston, 1937; G. Jones, 1991; Morrison, 1987). In the
context of public pedagogies, what is implicitly and explicitly taught through the art of
signifyin(g)? Simply stated, just as the null curricula asks researchers to read between
presences to find absence, what parts of public pedagogy do students of color control
through what is signif(y)ed in classrooms and corridors?
Conclusion

History, politics, space, place, presences, absences, differences, deficits, agency, power, cultures; these things are all tangled up in schools (Nespor, 1997). This ethnography aims not to untangle the knot of schooling but rather to explore the complexity of the liminal spaces between people, places, cultures and identities; the everyday of schooling that students of color negotiate. In these spaces the curriculum is enacted (Gershon, 2013b; Page, 1991; Schwab, 1969) and culture is reinscribed. Through the lens of sensory studies, this literature has demonstrated that the places and spaces in schools were historically designed with the specific function of marginalizing students of color. However, like all spaces and places, they have the ability to incite resistance and resilience, which is engendered through both individual and group agency.

Part of this agency is found in the enactment of curricular forms in both classroom and corridors (Metz, 1978). This means that knowledge is the function of all local actors, spaces, and places, not just an ideal or idea of the classroom. One’s way of knowing is therefore always public and a combination of community and individual. One’s way of being is therefore tied to what one knows, how one is treated and how political histories are at play. The friction of these factors (Tsing, 2005) creates a particular kind of motion in schools that, while often reifying norms and values, also burgeons possibilities.

As argued in the next section, the ethnographic framework is a reflexive form of interpretive methodology that intends to express “both the difficulties of representing or defining cultural others, and the inevitable historical and textual complicities underlying the location and legitimation of otherness” (Kanneh, 1998, p. 2). It is a methodological
framing that is purposefully employed to question the normalization of the intersection where the literature’s hidden discursive and historical links have constructed the current context where the ways of being and knowing of students of color are seen as a problem.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY: ETHNOGRAPHY AT THE INTERSECTION OF RESONANCE, DISSONANCE, AND THE MULTISENSUAL

The pollution of racism in schooling is constantly and consistently propagated through historically and politically situated places and spaces that designate the ways of knowing and being of students of color as Other (see Chapter 2). As students of color negotiate school spaces and places in ways that inform their lived experiences, they become uniquely positioned to articulate what schooling means in their particular context. The central question for this study, as well as the sub questions that support and complicate it, are intended to document everyday experiences and events. In the case of this study, the experiences of students of color were selected for the purpose of better understanding the contemporary context of educational ideals of equity and access initially explored through the African American intellectual tradition (e.g., Cooper, 1892; DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933). This study has also been intentionally designed to collaborate with participants who are both witnesses to these events and interpreters of their cultural significance. Through aligning the literature with the current context of the school and participant collaboration, these questions are designed to guide the study in its interpretation of the multiple subjective understandings of culture (Erickson, 2012).

Through exploring ethnographic literature, this chapter explicates the central purpose and use of this methodology in this study. As I describe in greater detail below, ethnographic methodology fits this study well because the study is designed to unpack the daily experiences and the ways of being and knowing of students of color as they
negotiate sociocultural norms and values in school. In sum, like many traditional and contemporary ethnographies, this study functions as more than a collection of narratives but rather as a cultural analysis of the local actors in the context of school. Given that culture is explored here, the concentrated, long-term focus through ethnographic methodology supports the study’s emphasis on reflexivity and ethical considerations not to “get it all wrong” (Wolcott, 1990). Similarly, through the application and further development of contemporary ethnographic practices, this study aims to unfold iterative and recursive events in schools (Agar, 1996) in order to deepen and complicate current understandings of students’ daily experiences within the cultural context of education.

As it is utilized here, ethnography is a fairly structured method of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. However, it is important to note that in keeping with contemporary practices, the methodology will incorporate a strong degree of fluidity intended to simultaneously balance and complicate questions of power, voice, and representation.

This section underscores the rhythm that serves as its methodological bass while allowing the subtle complexities that cause resonance and dissonance in the work to be highlighted (Gershon, 2013a).

I begin by outlining what it means to do ethnography (Agar, 1996) by first explaining the reason one utilizes this methodology. Next, I explicate the relationship of the methodology to the specific context of the study. Finally, the specific practices used to collect and analyze data are explained while I position myself within the complications of ethnographic work.
Thinking through these points is important for at least the following reasons. As presented in the previous chapter, schooling does not impact children in isolation. Similarly, the methodology through which these contexts are examined is not a solitary practice. Ethnographic work also has a history of marginalizing participants, as I detail below, attention to this history is important because a lack of attention to marginalizing forces simultaneously reinscribes that marginalization both theoretically and practically at the expense of local actors’ everyday experiences. Additionally, as it is not only explored in contemporary ethnographic work but also in affect theory, overlooking the role of the researcher can disregard the affect she has on the places and spaces of a particular context (Behar, 1996; Tsing, 2005). As is the case with any longitudinal study, and specifically in the tangled knot of schooling (Nespor, 1997), the context is always changed by the presence of an individual. Methods are not ahistorical nor are the contexts in which research is conducted. Therefore, when researchers “do research” in spaces, they bring with them not only their own history and the history of their methods but also actively intersect with the contemporary moment and history of the contexts that they study.

While traditional ethnographic work positioned the researcher within a relatively solitary status of authority (Agar, 1996); contemporary ethnographic perspectives often seek to think with rather than about local actors (Agar, 1996; Gershon, 2008; Lassiter, 2005; Rosaldo, 1993; Tsing, 2005). Though it should be noted that although all ethnographic work is inherently collaborative (Gershon, 2008; Lassiter, 2005), the power a researcher holds should generate crucial ethical responsibilities into one’s inquiry.
practice. Further, contemporary ethnographic work is both the process and product of an interpretation of cultures (Agar, 1996; Erickson, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Ortner, 2006; Rosaldo, 1993). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, cultures always underlie our embodied ways of thinking and being in the world.

If culture is a web of significance that both suspends and is spun by man ([sic], Geertz, 1973, p. 5), then, like ethnography, it is both a process and a product—a process of both spinning the web and of being suspended within what is produced. Additionally, similar to Massumi’s (2002) discussion on the ontogenic, ethnography and culture are positioned within a state *indeterminacy* and *determination* (Massumi, 2002, p. 8). The ontogenic is used here to describe the idea that one’s state of being is always in a state of becoming. Much in the way that being a teacher is not a static form that begins and ends when a license is issued but rather a fluid process of becoming within the everyday of experiences, I attend here to the ontogenic—the everyday of becoming and being. As culture is a constant process of becoming and making sense of how one knows that becoming, ethnography is a constant process to produce a product about how others becoming. Therefore, ethnographic work is the methodological art of inquiry that exists at the nexus of the temporal nature and material consequences of culture. As it is used here, it is the process of making sense, of unpacking the sensual, affective, and concrete relationships that exist in, between, and through people, history, and places (Feld & Basso, 1996; Gershon, 2011, 2013a; Helfenbein, 2004, 2010; Howes, 2003; Massey, 2005; Stoller, 1997; Woodson, 1933). Specifically, ontology is important in this study because one’s way of being informs the way she is in the world. Her intention and
actions are often advised by her “isness” (Gershon, 2013b). While this study also explores what students know, it is understood that what is known is also rooted in who one is. For example, a student of color can know about urban violence but her ways of being in light of her experiences with such incidents will strongly inform the ways she reacts when confronted with such altercations in practice. Attending not only to the narratives but also to the lived experiences of local actors as they unfold therefore necessitates an attention to the ontogenic—the ways of becoming as they inform ways of being and knowing.

Ethnographic work produces thick description that not only describes those written about but also gives insight into the way of life of the writer (Behar, 1996; Denzin, 1997; Geertz, 1973; Hobbs, 2006). It is generally understood across most forms of ethnography that description of sociocultural contexts, processes, semiotics, norms, values and systems of a group are interpreted by the participant observer (e.g., Agar, 1996; Cushing, 1941; Erickson, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Malinowski, 1922; Page, 2000). It is important to note that the term “participant observer” recognizes the presence of a researcher as always being simultaneously nested in her roles as both an observer of culture and a participant in the daily events she is observing.

This interpretation is important in at least two ways. First, it can be seen as a way of gaining insight into another culture, a way of “expanding our sense of human possibilities” (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 25) by seeing Others that in turn can provide a social analysis of the researcher and the researched. While ethnography has the dual capacity to generate and critique social ideas and ideals, it is important to note that the description
and analysis of one group is not perfectly generalizable to another. Groups, and the cultures that they observe, are not static and are driven by the confluence and friction of history, context, participants, material as well as ephemeral realities and understandings (Tsing, 2005; Visweswaran, 2010). Because groups are dynamic in nature, their ethnographic interpretations and descriptions should be regarded and contextualized, not generalized. In other words, while research often asks questions about generalization, it can also be un(intentionally) essentializing in nature.

Second, ethnographic work can be seen as a way of “inscribing,” of preserving, societal discourse (Erickson, 1986; Wolcott, 1990). For example, traditional ethnographic work is often unintentionally marginalizing through an Anglo interpretation and recording of people of color’s voices (e.g., Boas, 1888; Fletcher & La Fleche, 1911; Hewitt, 1903; Mead, 1928). The record of this social analysis can become a foundation to critically address injustices by moving toward a model that does not think for but rather thinks with local actors (Lassiter & Campbell, 2010; Madison, 2005). Through attending to the collaborative movement in qualitative methodology (Gershon, 2008; Lassiter, 2010) ethnographers can seek to move beyond straining over the shoulders of the local actors to whom the culture belongs (Geertz, 1973) and toward a vision of explicit reflexivity, collaboration and empowerment (Erickson, 2004).

Historically, the shift between a traditional approach of thinking for/about local actors (e.g., Boas, 1888; Fletcher & La Fleche, 1911; Hewitt, 1903; Mead, 1928) to thinking with participants (e.g., Behar, 1996; Gershon, 2008; Lassiter, 2010) has been important, especially in relation to students of color. This is because it is important to
note an underlying structure that is inherently Othering in ethnographic work. In many cases, while they are necessarily historically situated and important corner stones to the ethnographic field, ethnographies were used as tools to uncover the cultures of Others (cf, Douglas, 1963; Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Malinowski, 1922; Mead, 1928). The danger of developing a literary dialectic between self and Other, specifically when the researcher is positioned as the “professional stranger” (Agar, 1996), is that the relationship can generalize and reinscribe essentialized identities (Lister, 2004).

Additionally, interpretive research in schools has an established history of examining the relationship between culture and local actor’s negotiation of the places and spaces of schooling (MacLeod, 2008; Nespor, 1997; Page, 1991; Rist, 1973; Tatum, 2003; Waller, 1932/1965). The significance of this methodological focus is that it attends to the ways in which marginalizing structures can create the Other rather than the ways in which the Other interacts with certain sociocultural structures. This means that while marginalized populations certainly do interact with and negotiate sociocultural structures, a methodological emphasis is being placed on how those structures can be inherently marginalizing. In other words, one’s being with/in a culture can not only shape the culture but be shaped by broader sociocultural structures. Attending to these histories develops a critical lens for the possibility of both marginalizing and empowering methodological consequences inherent to ethnographic work.

As is often the case with contemporary ethnographic work, the intersection of historical methodological lines as they touch the current, multiple contexts and applications of method for ethnographic work is crucial to questions of representation and
lived experience (Behar, 1996; Honwana, 2006; MacLeod, 2008; Niezen, 2013; Rosaldo, 1993; Tsing, 2005). This intersection has particular significance within ethnographic research as it relates to the field of education. At this contemporary-historical juncture, ethnographic work in schools is positioned to explore the play between formal, official systems and the informal systems or social subcultures in schools (Jackson, 1968; Metz, 2000, 2003; Spindler & Hammond, 2006). Formal systems can be understood as the explicit content that students are intended to acquire in schools as well as the overt procedures that aim to maintain a particular school ecology (Goffman, 1961; Jackson, 1968; Metz, 2003; Page, 1991). Informal systems are generally positioned within the sociocultural contexts of the schools and broader communities (Goffman, 1961; Jackson, 1968; Metz, 2000, 2003).

Attending to interaction between the system of schooling and its local actors allows insight into daily lived experiences, practices and local actor negotiations between the formal structure and the fluidity of interactions (Metz, 2000). At the nexus of formal and informal structures in schools, educational ethnography can also provide a comprehensive, contextualized description of social interactions and their relation social structures and culture (Page, 1991; Pole & Morrison, 2003; Spindler & Hammond, 2000). Following Geertz’s (1973) discussion on *thick description*, a method of explaining culture(s) that includes several details not only of an individual’s actions but also of the cultural context surrounding those moments in order to complicate and layer interpretation, ethnographic accounts of schooling are important as they elucidate the everyday of schooling, the nested and knotted systems and cultures in schools.
Ethnographic work is uniquely situated to unpack the complex intersections of this knot in the web of school culture because the detailed, long-term study is designed to question the habitus of everyday life, document concrete details of practice, consider local meanings, create a comparative understanding of different social settings and move a set of understandings beyond immediate circumstances (Metz, 2000; Page, 1991). Furthermore, ethnographic work is both theoretical and practical, exploring the theoretical implications within the everyday of lived experiences.

In a contemporary ethnographic context, this means the participant observer often attends to inherent questions of power relationships between researcher and local actor (Agar, 1996). With this in mind, data collection and analysis for this study followed Agar’s transparent approach to ethnographic work. This indicates that, as outlined below, the researcher worked to attend to lines of power while recording sufficient data to demonstrate cultural recursions. While method and theory in ethnographic work are reciprocally linked and seamless in a way that is not always necessarily distinguishable, it was important to be clear with which methodological tools implemented in the study.

This is significant to the study of all people. However, in this specific case, because the majority of participants were from a marginalized student population, the crucial role as researcher was to ensure that in the search to unpack certain injustices in schools that the study itself did not reinscribe injustices or marginalizing factors to the lives of the local actors (see Page, 1991).
Analysis

Ethnographic work is abductive (Agar, 1996). By this Michael Agar means that ethnographic research processes are neither inductive nor deductive but lie somewhere in between. Where deductive reasoning starts with a hypothesis and utilizes data to support or contradict those initial assumptions, inductive reasoning begins with the information (data) and derives theory based on the understandings in the course of data collection. Abduction begins with a question and possible series of sub-questions that then must change in light of the information gathered. Abductive processes therefore move away from potentially closed sets of understandings and toward multiple possibilities of culture (see for example, in ethnography Rosaldo, 1993; Stoller, 1997; in curriculum studies Greene, 1988; Pinar, 1998). For example, just as Maxine Greene wrote about ways of being that are “not yet,” questions posed under abductive reasoning underscore the understanding that inquiry often changes as the researcher increasingly spends time within the research context. In turn, abductive reasoning also takes into account the ways in which the research site changes its original context in light of the researcher’s presence. Here Agar is attending to the ways that both the initial question and the research context move away from rigid binaries of being under abductive reasoning. Simply, abductive processes are consistently reflexive, attending to the ways one is within any context and the questions that result from time within those spaces and places.

Whereas the research site was initially chosen with an abductive understanding that both the initial question and the research context would be altered through the study, points of inquiry were drawn from rich points, or events which are unexpected and not
necessarily understood by the participant observer. For example, in a pilot study for this
dissertation that focused on a marginalized group of bi-racial boys who named
themselves “the Crew,” one rich point in the study was when one of the boys recruited
me for what he called a “war of the half breeds” against the Anglo staff and students—a
framing that I eventually understood was not a violence they intended but instead evoked
the violence they felt was done to them and the lines upon which those aggressions were
conducted. It is important to note that these rich points interrupt the ethnographer’s
understandings of what is normal and valued in a given context, not the local actors. In
other words, while a rich point has “signaled a gap between worlds” (Agar, 1996, p. 31),
what makes an interaction strange is the ethnographer’s worldview and the sociocultural
understandings that she brings to the new context.

Whereas rich points are moments that interrupt the researcher’s set of
understandings about culture and experiences. These rich points not only expand the
participant observer’s understanding of culture but they also can help to clarify frames
and strips of data. Here a frame can be seen as not only a snapshot of culture but also as
a lens through which that culture is interpreted. Like looking through a kaleidoscope, the
complexities and details of that fragment become clear as they are adjusted and supported
by previous observations. These fragments lead to strips, a term Agar (1996) has drawn
from film strips, segments of experiences seen through interviews, or behaviors observed
by the researcher. Rich points result from these strips as they can either bring the
researcher to the realization that there are new frames which she didn’t realize exist are
possible or that some other system of frames is in play. However, the ethnographer’s job
does not end at finding a new rich point or even pushing those rich points through another cycle of the frame-strip-rich point process. In observing the iterative and recursive loop of data, the frames are legitimized unless they help in the understanding of future strips (Agar, 1996). Once the frames are iterative, the ethnographer must work to see how multiple frames are interconnected.

**Representations of Data**

Page (2000) asked, “If power operates through research, should qualitative scholars become advocates for a particular ‘agenda’? And, if they do, how may advocacy compromise the equally important task of producing knowledge?” (p. 7). As Page argued, interpretive research sits in a tension between power and knowledge production. On one hand, without the participants, the data would not exist. On the other, without the researcher in the context, the daily lives of the local actors would not be considered “data.” Therefore the interpretation and representation of the data of local actors’ sensual daily lives is in constant friction between how knowledge is produced about the group through text and the underlying power structure that made that production possible (Gershon, 2011; Howes, 2003; Tsing, 2005). As data leaves the lives of the local actor and attempts to be brought to life through text, what is lost in traditional, written forms of representation? And, perhaps of equal importance, if data is represented through non-textual forms (audio, video, photos, mixed-media) does it create a greater sense of significance for and connection to the audience? Are interpretations enhanced by the addition of these forms of representation? How are geographies and narratives built, brought into focus and complicated by sounds and images beyond the text? In this study,
non-textual forms of representation, specifically audio recordings and photos, are utilized to foreground participant voice and data transparency. The difference between transcribed interviews and recordings of those interviews is much like listening to a mother explain the elated sounds of her child laughing versus hearing a recording of the event. Both are significant to the event but one enlivens the experience in a particular way for the listener.

Multisensory approaches to ethnographic work are important representationally as well as analytically (Aoki, 1991; Gershon, 2012; Pink, 2007; Stoller, 1997). As with traditional lines of qualitative work that focus on reflexivity as an important ethical consideration to the painstaking art of interpretation, emphasis on the sensorium in understanding perception calls for a reflexive focus on how experiences are represented (Gershon, 2011; Howes, 2003; Stoller, 1997). As postmodern theory historically has moved away from the static and toward the complicated (Pinar, 2004) and modern anthropological and sociological interests rest in the collaborative, polyphonic nature of research (Bakhtin, 1981; Gooden & Gastaldo, 2009; Lassiter, 2010; Lassiter & Campbell, 2010), multisensory research pushes at the ideal of diverse forms of representation that regard the affective tensions embodied in the senses rather than a singular platform of text (Howes, 2003; Pink, 2007; Stoller, 1997).

There is value in the textual representation of interpretive work and these representations do not sit on a binary with multisensual work. Rather, what is (re)called here is an attention to connections between experience and possible multisensory representations of data, to the crisis of representation in ethnographic work (Marcus,
Ethnographic work has a longstanding history of questioning how one adequately represents lived experiences (Agar, 1996; Erickson, 2004; Geertz, 1973; Gershon, 2012; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Rosaldo, 1993). While contemporary ethnographic ideas and ideals of representation often seek transparency and broader discourse around non-Western ways of knowing, the work is still frequently grounded in ocular examples. If interpretive research strives to avoid privileging western over non-western ontological and epistemological views (Stoller, 1997) and if it is understood that all narratives exist in the sensorium (Feld & Basso, 1996), then the representation of that experience should also be to some degree multisensory.

As previously stated, ethnographic methodology is in many ways the study of how people make sense (e.g., Erickson, 1986; Gottlieb & Graham, 2012; Ortner, 2006; Stewart, 2007). However, normalized constructions of sensation and signification often serve to replicate dominant discourses in educational epistemologies and ontologies (Kumashiro, 2009). Multisensual ethnography is significant in the interruption of the reproduction of the discourse and dissemination of this knowledge. A multisensual approach serves to disrupt the privileging of ocular ways of knowing (Gershon & Wozolek, 2013). It asks, for example, does sight render a deeper analysis than sound? Inversely, what is missed when things are heard and not seen? However, while sensory studies argue that when multiple senses operate, people shape more complete understandings, ocular representations still position the lives of local actors (Gershon & Wozolek, 2013).
Perhaps more importantly, the use of technology to collect multisensual ethnographic data allows participants to be active in the data collection process. Although the use of audio recordings in ethnographic data collection is certainly not new, even contemporary ethnographic work tends to distill those recordings into written discourse. Therefore while using local actors as tools through which data is gained, the voice and work of the participant observer is heard above those of the local actors in the final text. The decision to not only collaborate with local actors in the data collection but also to include participant driven interpretations with/in the text is central to multisensual work as it continually attends to questions of power and representation. In sum, how can one study with a marginalized student population and not empower them in the collection of data? Furthermore, if the data represented was solely collected and analyzed by the researcher, what contextual pieces are missed for possible questions of control over the study?

Finally, attending to data and research contexts from a multisensual approach further imbricates questions of affect into ethnographic work. Interpretive studies, both in and out of educational settings, have a longstanding history of considering questions of affect (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Gershon, 2012; Kondo, 1990; Tsing, 2005). Additionally, questions of affect are certainly not new to the social sciences (e.g., Aoki, 1991; Cooper, 1892; DuBois, 1903; Greene, 1995; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010; Tutt, 2008; Woodson, 1933). Although these are strong examples of significant work in the field, scholarship tends to focus largely on how participants are affected by ecologies and the subsequent impact on educational epistemologies without strong ties to broader methodological
questions (Gershon & Wozolek, 2014). Yet affect is central to ethical questions in method. For example, if affect sticks and preserves “the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 29), then it is a material factor that exists between local actors and the researcher. In other words, as affect is felt and shared given in a context it is inherently a part of the method being employed. In this case, the researcher is continually affected by the context while observing affects and affecting others. Ethically it is the responsibility of the researcher to meet this action with intention, particularly where children’s health and wellbeing are concerned (Apple, 2006; MacLeod, 2008; McLeod, 1992; Sedgwick, 2003; Wozolek, 2015).

Individuals inherently affect and are affected by contexts. As Gershon (2011) wrote, “we live sensual lives” (p. 1). For example, it would be difficult to stand in the hallway of a high school at the end of the school day as hundreds of children are moving out of the building and not experience any sensations or be affected by the mass flow of bodies. This is important to note because the sensation comes first and signification follows. If ethnographic work is semiotic in nature (Geertz, 1973) the signs and significance of those symbols would not exist without sensation on the part of the participant observer. If a researcher is both participant and observer in an ethnographic study, then interpretation is always tied to sensation is some form. Multisensual ethnographic work attends to the sensual connections that constitute daily interactions and experiences. Those interactions do not exist outside of the sensorium or affect. The inherent collaborative nature of research therefore includes the affective relationships between people and things that constitute the ecologies. In sum, multisensual
ethnographic resides as much in understanding how one “is” as how one knows and makes sense in the affective.

On such way to attend to and represent questions of being in schooling, both in micro and macro interactions, is through mapping (Gershon, 2013a; Helfenbein, 2004; Powell, 2010). As Gershon (2013a) argued, mapping that attends to the intersection of the sensual and critical can also be imbricated with questions of space, place, identity, and curricular forms in schools. As such, learning and being with/in institutional contexts exists in all places, from the classroom to the corridor (Metz, 1978). Like the social fields at play in culture (Bourdieu, 1993), the boundaries that exist between classrooms and corridors (Metz, 1978) are porous spaces of possibility that both speak to and leak questions of resistance, resilience and identity (Helfenbein, 2010). As discussed in the previous chapter, fields elucidate sociocultural power structures, norms and values that local actors negotiate in their daily lives. It is additionally important to remember that, like the fluid boundaries of maps, the questions of student identity traversed through this representation of data is equally fluid and contextually relational (Gershon, 2013a; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Therefore, as Gershon (2013a) noted,

The identity of social actors is located in the ways in which they negotiate meaning with others, whether another person is present or not, and regardless of the degree to which that relationship is explicit or implicit in a social actor’s interactions with others. (p. 26)

As ethnographic work attends to semiotic process of untangling the web of culture and identity (Geertz, 1973), maps provide a useful representations that depict the
“multisensory, lived experiences of space, time, and place in nonlinear ways . . . that illuminate and (re)present critical social, cultural and political issues” (Powell, 2010, p. 540). In sum, understanding how students “be” and “know” in schools can be felt and expressed through mapping.

In this case, the mapping process was two-fold: a sound recording where children represented their spaces and places individually and in groups as well as drawn representations of spaces, places and experiences. The decision to use both visual and sonic representations of space and place is important not only to the development of multisensual ethnographic understandings but also strongly relates to the previously discussed literature and historical lens within the African American intellectual tradition. Within this tradition there is a (re)calling to the “songs in which the soul of the Black slave spoke to men . . . the rhythmic cry of the slave that stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas” (DuBois, 1903, p. 24). The use of sound in this and other cases (see Cooper, 1892; Douglass, 1855; Gabbard, 1995; Gates, 1988; Komunyakaa, 2002; Morrison, 1992; Truth, 1851) can be seen as a modality for rethinking culture (Sterne, 2012). The use of sounded maps in this case is done in the spirit of promoting student agency (Gershon, 2013a); a method of encouraging students to collect data that speaks back to and (re)thinks school culture.

Although sound studies generally “takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival” (Sterne, 2012, p. 2), it functions here as narrative cartography (Gershon, 2013a), telling stories and experiences imprinted on spaces and places children negotiate
daily (Bhagat & Mogel, 2008; Gershon, 2013a; Hudak, 1999; Powell, 2010). Sound here is not just the point of departure or arrival of analysis but rather a methodological tool within multisensory ethnographic work that examines space and place through and with student voice. In sum, sound is used here to ask what “counts” as data and how can the inclusion of new forms further complicate scholarly understandings of schooling?

This is considered a “sonic” ethnography (Gershon, 2012) because of the inclusion of audio files as they are intended to give literal and theoretical voice to the participants while wrestling with questions of power, transparency and representation. The move from multisensual, or attending to all senses through a variety of media resources, to sonic, attending to sound alongside the ocular representation of text and photos, is intentional. It is on one hand practical, addressing the concerns of my institution’s review board to protect students who are not participants, something that would become far more difficult to negotiate with other tools like video recordings.

However, and more importantly, the use of sound is a move away from the ocular of traditional ethnographic texts. As Gershon (2012) articulated,

Sounds are qualitatively different than texts in significant ways that can be methodologically advantageous for ethnographers. For example, sounds tend to unfold with a particular chronology that causes listeners to experience them differently than they attend to texts, skimming sounds is not the same as skimming texts. Along similar lines, sounds have a messy fluidity and openness that texts and vision do not. For a hearing person, sounds are omnidirectional and one cannot close and “earlid” to avoid particular sounds. (p. 5)
As this dissertation attends to a marginalized student population, the use of sonic ethnography therefore intentionally disallows the reader to “close an earlid” (Gershon, 2012, p. 5) to the experiences and narratives recorded by the participants.

Research Context

The research for this study took place over the course of the 2013–2014 academic year in order to better observe changes in student culture as it applies to the cultural ebb and flow throughout the year. Specifically, it gave me time to observe students as they settled into the routine of school, became involved in social, academic, and sports activities as well as to experience the flow of semester courses.

Bridgeport 2Senior High School is a predominantly Anglo high school in northeast Ohio with a student population that is approximately 94% Caucasian, 3% African American, 1% Hispanic, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American combined (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011), racial demographics mirrored in the school’s faculty and administration. There are only three faculty members of color in the building, myself included. The site was purposefully selected based on (a) a willingness to participate in a long-term study where a researcher of color is thinking with students of color about student perception of self and school culture, (b) a context where students of color are not only minorities within an Anglo population but marginalized through curricular forms and school culture, and (c) invitation to think with students was student initiated, spurring the previous study. It should also be noted that the decision to research at this site was in many ways a practical decision as it was the school where I am

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2 For the protection of the participants, all proper nouns are pseudonyms.
employed full time as a world language teacher (Spanish). This means that, in many ways, relationships with some participants had already been established by my everyday presence at the school the four years I taught there prior to the beginning of the study.

Participants

In keeping with contemporary ethnographic practices, participation in this study was voluntary. The decision to focus on a small group of students, which was predominantly students of color, in this particular context, is central to this study. The voices shared in this ethnographic account of a context are at once positioned as a diverse set of narratives that complicated dominant understandings of schooling while working to attend diligently to methodological and ethical considerations so that the marginalization of student voices is not reinscribed through this work. Participants then have as much significance as the unpacking of historical complexities in the literature and method and therefore have a substantial amount of power in ethnographic work and this study. In sum, without the voices represented here, this work would not exist.

Rather than collecting a specific number of participants, this study aimed at accumulating data until it was thoroughly iterative and recursive (Agar, 1996, 2004). As with most strong, contemporary ethnographic work, the narratives of participants often played with each other in both resonance and dissonance. In other words, reflexivity was placed alongside but not above the complexities of who participated or the narratives their lives revealed. In addition, it should be noted that participants in this study are not all of the students of color in the building. Some exercised their right to refuse participation whereas others wanted to participate but could not receive parental consent.
This created an inherent tension between quoting those students who did participate and working around those voices that opted to be left out.

It is also significant to explain that this study followed a one year narrative study in the same school that worked with 15 bi-racial and African American boys. When I began this study that is my dissertation, I began by following up with boys who were participants in the previous year’s study. When the boys from the pilot study learned I was doing additional work, they left my classroom for a minute and came back up with several more students. I let the upperclassmen describe the kind of work I did in the previous year. My intent here was to allow the boys to speak for themselves and reveal their perspective on the experience of participating in a research study rather than me vocalizing my opinion. I followed their talk by explaining how this might be different and the kind of commitment I was seeking from participants. I reached out to other participants by simply going to the main group and asking if I could hang out with the students for a while and then explaining my work.

Twenty-nine students, two parents, four teachers, the school resource officer, a cafetera worker, a boys’ basketball coach, and four building principals agreed to participate in this study. Of the students, 15 were female and 14 were male. Students racially identified themselves in the following ways: Three students were Caucasian (one male, two female), one female was Indian, one female was Brazilian-American, one female was Black with Guyanese roots, three males and three females were biracial, and 20 students identified as African American. Of the 29 students, two openly identified as
lesbians and one female said she was questioning her sexual identity. Sixteen students reported that they were on the free/reduced lunch program.

Adult participants were selected through a combination of their relationship to the students in this study and their professional roles at the school. As relationships between students and faculty emerged during the study, adults were invited for interviews. Although many adults in this study had official roles that were often tied to their employment within the school, which informed the way that others identified them, they had identities that resonated and/or were dissonant with these roles. For example, the coach, who identified as African American, was deeply committed to the social development, personal growth, as well as the athletic and educational success of the players. Inversely, his position kept him in frequent contact with the administration, teachers, and parents. However, it is important to note that the diversity of student participants was not mirrored in adult participation. On one hand this is because of a staff of 120 at the high school, there are only three staff members of color, including myself. On the other, students of color were foregrounded in this study, with the background of a predominantly Anglo student population. In sum, this study focuses on the least represented population at the school and as such helps better understand not only their own positionality but the ways in which norms and values function at the school.

Complications of Self

Anthropology is about embarking on a voyage through a long tunnel . . . [It is] loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too
distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of cowardice, a sense of utter uselessness of writing anything and yet the burning desire to write something, [these are] the stopping places along the way . . . Anthropology is a mode of knowing that depends on the particular relationship formed by a particular anthropologist with a particular set of people in a particular time and place, anthropology has always been vexed about the question of vulnerability. (Behar, 1996, p. 5)

Behar’s eloquent quote tends to ring true for most ethnographic studies: How many participant observers stand at least once, in the thick of a study, slightly immobilized by their own positionality, by their vulnerability to the context? This is particularly the case for my set of positions in the context of this school and community. In the context of this study, the multiple, interwoven positions that contributed to my ways of being and knowing during the year of data collection and the subsequent analysis is significant.

To begin, I am not only a researcher at the site, struggling with the “fear of observing” (Behar, 1996, p. 5), but I am also a world language teacher in the high school where data were collected. In this dual position, I felt a particular friction of teacher and researcher responsibilities as they intersected with personal consciousness. This double bind of my role in the context as a researcher and a teacher is important to the context of this study. The power of being a figure of authority in schools and the authority that is inherently tangled up (Nespor, 1997) in research can be compelling to students. For example, a student may feel obliged to participate as the research is a novelty within the schooling context. With this in mind it was important for me to take into consideration
the position of the students, being sure that my work did not become a marker of power imbalances and further marginalization of students. Practically, I dealt with this tension by making decisions in the best interest of students as minors within a school community. My role as researcher often put me in a friendly rather than teacher role with students. This role also gave rise to tensions between my administrators and me when, for example, a few principals felt frustrated when I refused to reveal confidential data in spite of their direct requests for that information. However, as it is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, at times participants revealed information that needed to be reported in order to make decisions in the best interest of the student’s safety.

For example, my role of researcher often conflicted with district expectations of me as a teacher at the school. More specifically, I had to make decisions about school infractions, such as moments when students used “inappropriate language” as I was taking field notes. As an ethnographer, I needed to record the information; as their teacher I needed to correct the action. Where was I to draw the line when all lines are always in some ways arbitrary? Such questions were further complicated by demographics—I was one of only three teachers of color in the entire school of 2,400 students. From the time I began working in this district, students, staff, and administration have identified me in particular ways based on race that do not always align with my personal identity as a biracial woman. For example, on multiple occasions I was called a “spic” by colleagues who expressed their discomfort with colleagues of color. This positionality has created a double consciousness (DuBois, 1903) where I am
at once the oppressor and the oppressed (Freire, 1970), at once always both teacher and researcher of color.

Further, as it is discussed in the data, my role as a teacher often bound me to certain times that I could make observations. For example, what I was able to come in before school started and stay until the children left, aside from my two planning periods and lunch, I was unable to walk the building freely to make observations. This positioned me to, on one hand, miss events as they unfolded while, on the other, be in one place for students to report events as they felt comfortable. The hours I spent specifically doing ethnographic data collection where I had no obligations as a teacher was about 4 hours a day for the 36 weeks of the school year. However, being on site every day for students to approach meant that data collection did not stop or start the moment I crossed into my classroom. It merely meant that my classroom became a part of the research, as detailed in other chapters.

Additionally, this is the district from which I graduated high school. The current upper-middle class city observes many conservative political and personal norms and values. Many residents openly discuss the encroaching demographics of people of color and cling to the vestiges of the small town where I grew up. There are classic car days at the local Dairy Queen, Farmers Markets on Sunday, a local brass band that plays at the town gazebo on Friday nights, and a fairly large group of hunters that miss school in the fall. While the city limits have expanded, the city has only seen a rise of 2% in the residents of color in the past 20 years. While the aura of “hometown USA” certainly contributed to the overall population growth of this suburban city, the strong undercurrent
of racism that existed during my childhood should be noted. This was a place, for
eexample, where as a young child I was chained to a tree by two neighborhood boys who
demanded to know if my dad was a terrorist and if I had a green card. Although, as
Behar (1996) noted, while a researcher’s personal history inevitably plays strongly into
how she sees an event, I worked to view my histories reflexively in order to understand
how they nested into my perceptions of the current context. Additionally, as necessary, I
asked students how or if they felt my past experiences were still resonant to their current
context. Interview questions, however, generally focused on their perceptions and
understandings of the school and education. Specifically, interviews were conducted
with a fluid structure asking questions or giving statements like: “Tell me a bit about
school,” or, “what would you like to tell me about your day?”

The research site itself is a place where, as students, my older brother and I were
both asked by teachers, “If your last name is Fernandes, why can’t you speak fluent
Spanish?” It is a place where a boy I liked was told by his father that “brown girls are to
have fun with until you settle down with a nice girl.” Conversely, it is a place where I
made state championships for gymnastics, was on the honor roll several times,
participated in marching band, orchestra, and symphonic band, ran track, and was in the
school play. While I often felt like the token athlete or musician of color, frequently
being called the “Portuguese Pocahontas” of groups like the marching band, my status as
an athlete gave me wiggle room to enact some sense of agency within the school.

As a young child, I lived in a house with dual incomes but after my parents’
divorce we lived mainly off of my mother’s teaching salary. Questions of mortgage
payments and grocery bills were not unusual in my house as a high school student and I began my first job at 14 years old. This position was sharply juxtaposed when I visited my grandmother in Goa during the summers of my undergraduate program. She lived, by the village’s standards, in the upper class and was able to afford a maid and workers for the house when necessary. It is further complicated by my current financial position that sits well with in the upper-middle class by Midwestern suburban standards.

The complexity of these financial positions and experiences is important to this study for at least the following reasons. First, traditional ethnographies are considered a “voyage” (Behar, 1996), a journey of studying the Other. In this case, the Others are marginalized children living experiences that are similar to and yet vastly different than my own. For example, I am biracial but have not lived as a biracial, African American/Caucasian teenager. Similarly, I am empathetic and open with students about the multiple possibilities of family structures and financial difficulties but am clear with them that I have never lived, for example, with a single parent. This creates a friction that both recalls my past and yet pushes for an impartial knowing, an inattention to my own biracial and lived experiences. Second, the vestiges of my past and present context closely tie me to the research site and its local actors. Therefore this study resides in multiple intersections of tension, the nodes of self (Wozolek, 2012). When I see a teacher speaking inappropriately to a student of color, how should I react? As a vulnerable observer? As a staff member who (publicly) supports her colleagues? Or as a person who has lived in and with this kind of discrimination daily? In sum, by being
reflexive, what are the implications for being separate and yet enmeshed in the knotted web (Geertz, 1973) of a school culture?

**Ethical Considerations**

It is important to note that reflexivity was central to the ethical considerations of this study. In anthropology, reflexivity refers to the inward analytic focus on relationships. It can be seen as two branches from the same tree, one focusing more on power relations and knowledge production while the other is more specifically directed inward toward the participant observer herself (Gemignani, 2011). The reflexivity of collaborative ethnography aims to dismantle oppressive power structures by seeking to collaboratively examine sociocultural norms, such as political structures or gender inequities that may be habitus, or normalized (Bourdieu, 1993), for the actors. Reflectivity also works to turn the researcher inward to examine normalized structures within the academy, like the process of writing ethnographic texts alongside rather than with the actors (Lassiter, 2005, 2009). Through a process of introspection in several different spaces, reflexivity helps ethnography “affirm identity and increase efficacy” with the actors (Cummins, 2003, p. 424).

Along with attending reflexively to information and processes, there were a number of ethical considerations that were addressed prior to and used during this study. First, this study complied with approved research procedures and stipulations for consent/assent from minors and their legal guardians by Kent State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Second, as required through the IRB, site approval was gained prior to IRB proposal submission. Along with this permission from the
school’s administrator is the understanding that I would work to comply with any policies and procedures for conducting research at the school and within the broader community of the district.

Finally, and perhaps of primary importance, as described above, this study is designed to think with rather than about students of color (Rist, 1973; Tatum, 2003; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Beyond compliance with legal requirements I intentionally conducted this study with an ethical fidelity that sought to preserve the dignity of and promote respect for all participants. This is important for several reasons. It attends to the complexities of interpretive studies in that it is nested in questions of who has the power to interpret a story, to be the conduit for someone’s voice and relate it in a genuine manner that is respectful of the local actor. In a study that focuses on students of color whose voices may have been silenced or may not otherwise be given this particular kind of platform to be heard (Rist, 1973; Tatum, 2003; Varenne & McDermott, 1998), empowerment becomes a significant factor in this work.

It is the relationship between interpreter and local actors that inherently complicate and change the research context. Without a narrator the study would not exist in the same form and there would be nothing to name as data. Conversely, without the researcher, the narrators’ stories may not have the opportunity to reach an audience outside of their immediate context. This again speaks to the previous discussion about the crisis of representation (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). What is represented without the power to study or the ability to simply be in a context? While both parties, local actor and researcher, are granting space to each other, in one way to listen and in another to be
heard, the power dynamics are inherently shifted toward that of the researcher. The idea of space being “granted,” even with the intention of a positive opportunity for students, is inherently tied to a power structure that underpins interpretive studies in schools. Recognition of this structure is an important step in the negotiation of the communicative relationship between researcher and local actor.

**Validity Versus Resonance**

Wolcott expressed the stress of taking “considerable pains not to get it all wrong” (Wolcott, 1990, p. 127). One possible complication of validity in the journey not to get it all wrong is a question of determining to and for whom the data are considered valid. Further, what shapes a “valid” study? If validity is truly in the eyes of the beholder, is an emphasis placed on a search for validity or a process of finding those for whom the work is most valid? With this consideration, rather than arguing for validity, I am more concerned with questions of resonance (Erlmann, 2010; Gershon, 2013a). Following its quantitative roots, constructions of validity may assume there is a “wrong” or “right” in qualitative research. This is not to say that following a method to ensure strong, sound-ed (Gershon, 2013a) work is not significant. The previous discussion on ethnographic historical lines of inquiry and analysis certainly has ethical implications that should inform movement toward transparent and perhaps valid findings. Resonance, used in this critique of a concrete form of validity, asks for whom and why the analysis is significant rather than crafting interpretation for a particular idea or ideal.

As outlined above, the process of data collection and analysis in ethnographic work attends to the desire to accurately describe and understand a culture through the
method’s iterative and recursive nature according to the local actors. As Agar (1996) argued, data become *massively overdetermined* within these iterations and recursions. This means that the aspect of culture is not only omnipresent locally but is also expressed in less local sociocultural understandings. Ethnographically, the resonance of massive overdetermination explicitly and/or implicitly affects local actors. Although this does not necessarily prove an interpretation to be valid, it can signal a resonance of interpretation with the local context.

Along similar lines, ethnographic work is interpretive. As such, it is not what is collected but rather how the researcher decides to use data in her interpretation that also contributes to the ideas and ideals of resonance. What makes a study “valid” is highly contested because it is a dual process of interpretation (Winter, 2000). First, it is in the hands of the researcher and her use of the tools and data available. Second it is in the perspective of the reader, deciding if the methodology used fit the analysis given. The specific indicators of what makes a study valid, the points that avoid letting the researcher “get it all wrong” may therefore be impossible to define. In the case of this study, validity will be approached with caution, understanding that it is in many ways the contextualized result of interpretations and perspectives. Because, as Page (1991) argued, generalization is in the hands of the reader, it is the position of the researcher to represent the context with a high degree of transparency and clarity.

To be clear, this study is concerned with the ethical considerations of reaching validity through transparency, subjectivity, and reflexivity (Behar, 2006; Davies & Dodd, 2002). It is also aligned with Lather’s (1986) discussion of catalytic validity, which
declares validity through empowerment of participants. Empowerment, in this context, is met through reflexive collaboration with participants so the lines of culture are interpreted with rather than for students.

**Generalizability**

Generalizability is often discussed as dichotomous between perceiving results as unique or generalizable (LeCompte & Preissle Goetz, 1982). However, these possibilities are not mutually exclusive and arguing their bifurcation may yet place them on a false binary. Instead, I would argue that ethnographic findings are necessarily contextualized and possibly generalizable as a set of social ideas that were generated within a specific space. The difficulty in viewing anything as completely generalizable has essentialist undertones that can be marginalizing to both the initial group studied and the new context being generalized under the findings. Rather than looking at generalizing to validate findings, one could instead draw comparative understandings between the immediate ethnographic setting and broader implications for other societies. While building awareness of possible comparative understandings, it is important to note that it does not necessarily “lead to immediate practical solutions in planning change” (Erickson, 1986, p. 122). In other words, generalization should not be used as essentialization. Rather, as Erickson (1986) argued, it should be used as a system to draw relations in order to nuance the findings to broader ecologies and sociocultural spaces.

**Conclusion**

Students of color are marginalized through the history and current contexts of schooling (Cooper, 1892; Delpit, 1995, 2012; Jackson, 1968; Watkins, 2001; Woodson,
1933). Further, scholars of color have been largely left out of historical contexts in the field of curriculum studies. However, this inattention to voices and perspectives of color in schooling and scholarship has shaped some strong work in the contemporary field of educational research. The absences of these perspectives are similarly found in the history and traditional approaches to ethnographic methodologies. Admittedly, there are potential ethical implications of using a historically marginalizing method to research the marginalizing practices of schools. However it is the attention to these historical lines that, rather than dismissing them as past practices, ties the researcher to an awareness that necessitates care and reflexivity.

Through multisensual approaches to data collection and representation, this research aims not to overcome historical practices but rather to wrestle with them in ways that resonate with ethical considerations while thinking with those who have un-intentional absences in educational and methodological contexts. To be clear, this does not mean that other contemporary models of ethnographic research do not push at the same boundaries. This work firmly stands on the shoulders of qualitative researchers who have worked toward these ends (Gershon, 2011; Tatum, 2003; Varenne & McDermott, 1998).

Further, the structured analysis is not to obstruct fluidity but rather to position a structure that seeks reflexive analysis of representative data. In sum, this research is designed to encourage student agency and empowerment and resist scholarly essentialization of participants (Erickson, 2004; Gershon, 2012). Through an ethnographic move to thinking with rather than for local actors, this research seeks to
honor the complexities of the inherent paradigmatic collaboration while understanding how participants make sense of their own complex every day experiences.
CHAPTER III

DATA ANALYSIS 1: TOO BLACK FOR SCHOOL: FINDING PLACES, MAKING SPACES IN THE CORRIDORS OF SCHOOL

It’s 7:17am and the hallways of the high school are filled with the sound of teenagers talking, laughing, and moving toward their first period classes. Three or four minutes before the bell rings, a song begins to play over the PA. A new song is played daily as a reminder that class will start soon. As the music starts there is typically a lull in conversation as the students listen to hear the morning selection. Generally, pop songs or oldies tunes fill the halls but this morning the Jackson 5’s *ABC* begins to play. A large group of African American and bi-racial students who spend their time in the morning socializing by the stairs outside of the gym stop moving and talking completely.

As the music begins to pick up there is a loud, “Aaaahhh yea!” that erupts from the group. One boy calls out, “They found some of our music! That’s right, now it’s our time!” Several of the boys begin to dance, clap, and sing along while the girls in the group watch and giggle at the display. The display, a chance to show off for the girls, also functioned as a performative demonstration for other students and staff. Anglo students passing by give the group a wide berth and either stare with great intent, pointing as they pass, or they work equally hard not to look. An administrator who frequently monitors the hallway in the morning says nothing to the group and instead shakes his head, sincerely without an ounce of irony, eyeing the group carefully but not interrupting. The song continues and the group moves to class, making sure to drop off
the youngest students in their halls, hugging and giving handshakes as the group diminishes and classes begin.³

**Finding Space and Place in School**

The vignette above is as much about place as it is about identity (Massey, 2005) and as much about space as it is about power (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Just as place and space exist at the intersections of historical, political, and everyday experiences (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Harvey, 1973; Helfenbein, 2010; Massey, 2005; Soja, 2010), they are similarly imbricated with individual and group ways of knowing and being. As such, place is imbued with plural perspectives and meanings from local actors as “centers of felt value” (Tuan, 1977, p. 4). The idea of space and place are therefore interrelated (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Helfenbein, 2010; Tuan, 1977)—without socially constructed norms and values, the identity of a place is changed. Without place, the ontological and epistemological relations of space are altered. Place, for example, has a sociocultural identity (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Places are therefore as much about the physical as they are about the sociocultural. Places, then, are as permeated with multiplicity as space. As Massey reminded us, space exists as a “sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist . . . without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space” (Massey, 2005, p. 9).

Within spaces and places, boundaries and borders exist in fluid states of being formed, dispersed, and reimagined. The social construction of borders and boundaries

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³ It should be noted that throughout the dissertation, all vignettes are told in present tense and italicized for easy identification.
can be understood as part of the place-making process that is embedded in a web of history and politics (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Helfenbein, 2012; Massey, 1993). However, it is significant to note that, as Helfenbein (2012) argued, the social structures that create spaces and places are as incorporeal as they are material. This is important because if borders have material grounding, the traversing of borders and boundaries is an enactment of agency within a “space of possibility” (Helfenbein, 2012, p. 103). If boundaries and borders “speak, leak and have possibility” (Helfenbein, 2010, p. 305), the spaces and places that create these structures are similarly fluid and imbued with possibilities.

Understanding the multiple, nested ways spaces and places are used, felt, and constructed can be a difficult task. One obstacle to unpacking the tangled knot of spaces and places (Nespor, 1997) is the practical consideration that it is impossible for a researcher to be everywhere or perceive everything. She can never encounter every experience along with local actors, nor can she expect to become a part of every potential space or experience them as participants. Despite painstaking work not to get it all wrong (Wolcott, 1990) the data will always be, in some way, positioned narrative (Ange, 1996; Geertz, 1973). For these and other such reasons, attending to questions of space and place can serve to help make often unspoken and tacit understandings more explicit. One such way to attend to these and other intersections of space, place, identity, and experiences is through mapping (Harmon, 2003; Wood, 2010).

In this particular study, mapping was used as a tool to better understand the nuances of the many positioned “truths” that compose the everyday for students of color.
These maps serve not only as a “directional tool” but also as a means to document “socio-geographical notions of place, social relationships . . . and participant perspectives” (Powell, 2010, p. 543). The maps presented here are both visual drawings students created to represent their experience and the school as well as voice recordings of students talking about and back to spaces and places in the building. These two representations are at once ocular, bringing the researcher and reader “directly to the context of representation” (Pink, 2007, p. 16), and sonic, foregrounding participant voice in a way that “maps a student in relation to the spaces and places that inform his identity” (Gershon, 2013a, p. 12). In sum, these maps represented the embodied experience of the everyday.

What follows is an analysis of the spaces and places students of color mapped within a large, suburban high school. While the majority of maps were made by students of color within this predominantly Anglo context, other students (including an out Anglo lesbian, a Jewish girl, an openly racist Anglo boy, and an Anglo girl) also participated in the project in order to more fully outline commonsense understandings of the school. To be clear, Anglo students who participated in this study were not a control against which students of color were measured but instead were present to provide context in enunciating those commonplace understandings at Bridgeport Senior High School.

Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that while the term “students of color”

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4 It is important to note that while the traditional and contemporary forms of this method are employed to unpack sociocultural spaces and places, the use of a map does not divorce the reality of a partitioned truth from data collected or its analysis. In the same sense that presenting audio files opens a space for transparency in representation, it must be noted that even these files are edited, first by the individual making the map and again by the researcher. In keeping with contemporary ethnographic practices, what is presented here is an attempt to be transparent not only in the files chosen but also within the contextualizing of those files (Gershon, 2013b).
broadly defines the group, students from African American, bi-racial, and Latin@ background were represented within the group. However, as I discuss later in the chapter, independent of their particular combination of history and experiences (whether racial or area of residency), students often performed mainstream media representations of similarly status quo sociocultural ideas and ideals about urban African American adolescents. Therefore, the goal here is not to untangle the knot of schooling but rather to look at the intersections within that knot (Nespor, 1997), the borders and boundaries, spaces and places, presented by students that connect the strands of activity that constitute the context of the school.

I begin by using students’ maps in conjunction with my own ethnographic notes and interviews to talk about particular places and spaces. I made the decision to use multiple layers of data collection in order to further contextualize students’ experiences and more deeply represent their narratives. Understanding how students of color negotiate questions of identity, power, knowing, and being in school is messy business. As noted above, spaces are always interconnected. Therefore, the process of teasing apart a particular place, while helpful for analysis, can cause a context to appear to be falsely isolated or independent from surrounding contexts that are always to some degree present. However, just as it would be difficult to understand a forest without looking at any singular tree, what is presented here are frames (Agar, 1996) of the school that build to understandings of the larger picture. All of the auditory maps collected share common places in the school that students chose to discuss. Those places are presented below through sound files that are representative of the overall data collected. Further, it should
be noted that pseudonyms to represent all students are not included with every track. As
this dissertation is particularly focused on student voice, this is not a move to take away
any aspect of identity with the voices heard. Their stories together indicate iterative
patterns in the school that are represented through the files. However, to be clear about
who is speaking and how their roles are related to transcribed conversations, all voices
along with links to the files, are included in Appendix A.

In terms of its scale, the school totals 545,600 square feet and is about a quarter
mile walk from one academic wing to the other. End to end, the school is roughly a
quarter mile walk. The building is split into academic wings that are separated by several
cafeteria spaces and two auditoriums. The wings are labeled the “green house” and the
“white house” after the school colors, white and green. However, after one year of
observing the culture at Bridgeport Senior High School, it became clear that not only
were jokes fairly prolific among the population of roughly 2,400 students about who
could learn on the “white side” but staff participants also commented on the innuendo of
the “white side” of the building. For example, Figure 1 was explicitly pointed out to me
by both students and staff as an example of how these sides of the building are openly
labeled with what they expressed as concern for the potentially inconsiderate actions of
those making the signs. These jests are only facilitated by the fact that the “white house”
is the side of the building that benefited from new construction and related upgrades.
When the building was renovated, the new structure was literally constructed around the
old building, leaving the vast majority of classrooms on the “green side” with rooms that,
while renovated, lack windows and continue to have leaky ceilings.
Little Africa is on the furthest tip of the green side of the building. As it is heard in the sound files below and became clear through numerous participant interviews, it is a place that has been called “Little Africa” by Anglo students and staff for generations as it is the one place in the school where students of color are consistently present. As Little Africa is on the “green side” it was present before the renovation that occurred over a decade ago. Although the name “Little Africa” seems to have been created and disseminated by Anglo students, students of color discuss the place as a concept that was passed by parents or siblings as a safe space to find when students enter the high school. Often in the morning and consistently in the afternoon, administrators stand at the opposite end of the hall from Little Africa. As students have explained, this gives students of color the option either to leave the building or use the restroom as ways to
escape being under administrative surveillance while being in Little Africa. As discussed later, using cultural capital some students were able to avoid this watchful eye through questions of gender and athletic ability.

The population of Little Africa throughout the day varies. At times, there are no students there and an empty staircase waits to be populated either through class change or as students of color find time to meet in this place. The number of youth who spend time here also varies from two or three to, as explained later in this chapter, as many as 20.

During this chapter, I frequently refer to the “underlife of the institution” (Goffman, 1961) that was discussed in the literature review. Goffman discussed the underlife of an institution as the enacted agency local actors use in order to push back at the institution’s power and authority. As argued in the literature review, institutions, like all places, have an identity and are structurally imbued with sociopolitical and cultural iterations of power (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Institutions are state sanctioned places that carry out the everyday processes of the nation state (Goffman, 1961; E. T. Hall, 1977; P. McLaren, 2002). As such, they are expressly built upon those policies, norms, and values. The underlife of an institution, as Goffman argued, responds to these deeply embedded structural iterations of normalized values. Goffman described two primary forms of resistance, the first being a “goal to radically change the status quo” whereas the second seeks to “subvert the status quo by working within and around the institution” (Constantino & Faltis, 1998, p. 115). As explored below, students of color in this context demonstrated an underlife that exercised their agency to resist the institution in the second form of resistance that did not necessarily radically change the status quo but
rather permitted additional wiggle room for students to create a relatively safe space against racialized institutional expectations of being and knowing in school. Specifically, as discussed below, students negotiated performances of self (Goffman, 1959) in the context of school that was in part a display of central aspects of their individual ways of being and in part a negotiation of broader sociocultural ideas and ideals of their being within the school. In other words, as Tuck and Wayne Yang (2014) argued and is further discussed below, students’ resistance does not dismantle or interrupt the status quo as a means to push back against authority. While students’ resistance against the structure of schooling did not necessarily change the broader school culture, it did open spaces for them to relax into their own ways of being and community during school hours. This is no small accomplishment as the wiggle room allows students, as Goffman (1961) discussed, the ability to form safe spaces within an institution where such places may otherwise be unavailable. In this case, a safe space is a place students can be themselves (see also Gershon, 2007).

While I spent a lot of time interacting with kids in these safe spaces, one of which being my own classroom, several tensions arose for me as I taught while researching in this context. One example of that tension was the amount of time I had during the day to observe students around the building. While I had a unique opportunity to have daily access to the research site, during instructional time I was unable to observe events as they unfolded around the building. Similarly, as students informed me through interviews, their peer contact and use of locations like Little Africa diminished throughout the day while they attended classes. The events that occurred during these
(un)observed times are certainly significant as they contribute to the lived experiences of these students. As fleshed out later in this chapter, events like fights and student arrests are certainly critical to the context of this school and the experiences of the students.

However, it is important to note the inherent difficulty a teacher-researcher faces as an “emic” member of the context who leans more heavily to the participant side of participant-observation, working to find time and perspective as she searches to achieve an etic view (Spindler & Hammond, 2006, p. 22). To be clear, ethnographic methodology consistently calls for the researcher to work toward iterative and recursive (Agar, 2004) data collection. However, while instructional duties often felt constraining in the pursuit of iterative layers of data, they often enabled me to build significant relationships with the participants in both my role as a researcher and as a teacher. This dual role, along with its positive and negative aspects, formed the lens through which I viewed data during instructional hours.

The rest of this chapter discusses students’ use of these safe spaces as well as how they negotiated the corridors and the underlife of the school. Because participants describe and utilize two places in the building as “Little Africa” has two places, I begin by talking about students’ experiences in the morning, between the cafeteria and the corridor. Although there is an inherent tension between the fact that the corridor is much more frequently utilized than the cafeteria by students of color, the distinction between these two places and naming of them is clear among students’ narratives and actions and therefore both are claimed as “Little Africa” below. Beginning with the morning use of these two places is not only for chronological fluidity of the narrative but also because
girls and boys of color tend to be together and interact between genders in the morning rather than among singular gender groups, as they do in the afternoon. The following section focuses on boys of color and their experiences throughout the day in the corridors of the school and in Little Africa. Next, I discuss girls’ experiences as they are interrelated to those of boys but unique in their perspective of gendered Othering. Finally, I discuss questions of sexual orientation as they related to both male and female groups in Little Africa.

**Little Africa: Morning Places, Community Spaces**

Little Africa is a place. For generations it has had two recognized locations at Bridgeport Senior High School, the stairs by the gym during and after school hours and the first set of tables in the cafeteria for breakfast. It has a history (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), a remembered past that is shared both by the students of color as well as their Anglo peers. This history has an accompanying in-group identity (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Massey, 2005; Tuan, 1977), one that is (re)created each year by returning and new students of color. Little Africa, to the majority of students of color in the school, serves as a place and space of community (Soja, 2010), one of safety and comfort in numbers but not in homogeneity. Specifically, the students who spend time in Little Africa are divided by gender, sexual orientation, and race. Whereas the term “students of color” broadly defines this group, it is inclusive of bi-racial, African American, Latin@, and Asian students. Conversely, the place and space occupied by Little Africa and its participants is identified by administration, staff, and Anglo students through lenses of

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5 For compatibility reasons, sound files in this dissertation should be opened with Chrome, Firefox or Internet Explorer.
race, class, gender, and ways of being that understood by people not of color as resistant to dominant Anglo cultures. For students in this study, to talk about Little Africa is therefore to think about (re)created resistance and resilience (Helfenbein, 2010) within ways of being and knowing that are the everyday of schooling for participants in this study.

The fact that Little Africa has two places between the cafeteria and the stairs does not take away its identity or sense of *placeness* (Ellis, 2005; J. M. Smith, Light, & Roberts, 1998). Following Tuan’s (1977) discussion on place having “felt value” (p. 4), Little Africa exists in two areas that are of habitual sites of activity (Brey, 1998) for students of color in general and, more specifically, participants in this study. Both individual and group members are involved in and in some ways responsible for the multiple creations of the place (Ellis, 2005). In this collaborative process of place-making, each year students of color create and recreate two places that are named “Little Africa.” It is important to note that this name is one that simultaneously functions as a place with which students of color identify as well as a place for which students of color are identified by Anglo students, administration, and staff. Further, students of color explicitly note the existence and use of Little Africa in the cafeteria in the morning for breakfast only. Construction of place is therefore not only collaboratively constructed but time based (Massey, 2005). During lunch periods, for example, students do not sit at the same set of tables or refer to the tables they do use during lunch as Little Africa. After breakfast, and during all other times of the day, Little Africa is located by the stairs at the back of the school. Additionally, it is significant to note that, as heard in the clips
above from the teacher and Anglo students, Little Africa is identified by those outside of
the group of students of color as only existing by the stairs. Over the length of the study,
administration, teachers, and Anglo students consistently did not recognize the cafeteria
in the morning as “Little Africa.” These distinctions are important because, as discussed
in greater detail below, the identities of each iteration of Little Africa served similar
purposes around questions of being and Blackness for students of color.

The vignette at the beginning of this chapter begins in the hall by the gym (see
Figure 2). However, rewind the clock 15 minutes, and the majority of students who
gathered by the stairs before going to class were eating breakfast in the cafeteria. When I
entered the cafeteria in the mornings, the sound of the registers clacking and the distinct
beeping of the students inputting in their cafeteria codes to buy food functioned like an
alarm clock.

The cafeteria is generally quieter in the morning than at lunch, with only students
on free/reduced meals or those who missed breakfast at home stopping in for a snack.
Sitting in segregated groups, three main cliques populate tables that seem to have been
claimed for the group long before any of these students began high school. The cliques
seem to be divided among students of color, a group of Anglo students who are on
free/reduced meals and a small cluster of LGBTQ students. As Tatum (2003) noted,
these clusters are as much about community as they are about identity. Groups did not
avoid contact with each other and occasionally one member interrupted a particularly
loud conversation from another group with a jocular exchange. The students of color
largely arrived in groups that walk together from their respective neighborhoods. As time
approached for class to begin, and the group of students of color had swelled to a critical mass around the limited seats at the table, many of them make their way to the main hallway, some still eating breakfast from their Styrofoam trays as they walked.

*Figure 2.* Maps created by male participants of the main hallway with special notes made to the girls’ restrooms, the gym, and the door to exit the building.

The comfortable morning ritual of community appeared to bring a sense of calm as the students started the day. Any drama between group members was momentarily put on hold and chatter about last night, homework due that day, and trepidation about going to classes dominated their conversations. On occasion, the school police officer monitored the cafeteria in the morning but generally there were no teachers or administrators in this place besides those who passed through to get to a classroom or office.
One student, Daniel\(^6\), compared his relationship to the cafeteria staff to that of a \textit{mother and son}. In a follow up interview, Daniel and another student, Sam, elaborated on their morning interactions in the cafeteria and the importance of that relationship between cafeteria staff and students of color.

\textbf{BW:} Tell me more about your morning routine. I mean, you enter the building in the morning, eat breakfast and hang out with your friends. Is that right?

\textbf{Sam:} Pretty much. Except some of us are not that great of friends, you know.

But we’re all on team dark skin. Gotta look out for that first. That and food. (laughs). We can always handle our shit later.

\textbf{BW:} Why set it aside for that moment? Why not “handle your shit” right then?

\textbf{Sam:} First of all, nigga\(^7\) knows not to get café privileges taken away. Don’t even know if they can do that but don’t wanna find out. And, I’m not tryin’ to make trouble there.

\textbf{BW:} Are there better places where you can “make trouble”?

\textbf{Sam:} I dunno. I guess so. Just not there. Not in the morning. I’m just trying to get my pancakes up in here! And milk! Playa can’t forget da milk.

\textbf{BW:} Only in the morning? What about during lunch? Can you make trouble during lunch?

\textbf{Sam:} Lunch is different. Other kids are there. Damn crackers. Lunch is just . . . different.

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\(^6\) All proper names used are pseudonyms

\(^7\) As I quote students, I did so using their original words. It is important to note that students often either spoke using African American Vernacular (AAV) and at times code switched between AAV and proper English. This code switching was inherent in their questions of identity and race, as discussed in this chapter.
BW: Daniel, you mentioned in one of your maps that the cafeteria ladies are like moms who should teach. Why is that?

Daniel: Yes, well they feed us, first of all . . . Like moms do. But more than that, even if they don’t always agree with us, they let us be ourselves. Moms do that. They take care of you, tell you when to knock it off but still love you in the end.

Sam: Yeah, and they should be teachers. Why can’t teachers have that same respect? I see them [teachers] in the morning. Sometimes you say “hi” to them and they act like they don’t even know you. Why they gotta be that way? Not like I won’t see you in a few hours.

When asked about the presence of students of color in the morning, Jenny, a middle aged, Anglo cafeteria employee, responded that she feels if students of color “felt they had somewhere to go where they wouldn’t be judged or under the thumb of authority . . . they would relate much better to adults.” In one sense, it could be argued that the cafeteria and its employees offer basic sustenance to students before beginning their day, therefore garnering respect for the spaces and places of the iteration of Little Africa in the morning in the cafeteria. However, the cafeteria also offers a kind of protection to students of color. It was not only a place where they “won’t be judged,” but it also served as a place where, in conjunction with a respect for the cafeteria workers, they did not have to engage in the performativity of Blackness (Fleetwood, 2010; hooks, 1992; Johnson, 2003). Further, as detailed below, cafeteria workers may have also provided the same kind of surveillance as administrators later in the day. However, it
should be noted that in part because of the generally positive relationship that cafeteria employees held with students of color and due to the different level of authority they offered, the surveillance in the cafeteria was perceived by students as less official and potentially less punitive than the perceptions of administrative surveillance. Practically this means that students were given a space to “be” themselves in the mornings while receiving some degree of surveillance by staff—a sense of independence under watchful eyes.

As students moved from the cafeteria and toward the stairs by the gym, the hallways began to swell with Anglo students who comprise the overwhelming majority of the 2,400 student population at Bridgeport Senior High School. Some of the students of color, mostly girls, broke away from the group and headed toward the restroom or their classes on the other side of the building. Because Little Africa is on the far part of the “green side,” only a few students who have morning classes touched base at the stairs if their classes were on the “white side” of the building. The rest of the group continued toward the stairs. Often a second part of the group broke off to, as they explained, do a “walk through” to “see what’s up” on the lower level of the green side. The group intersected by the stairs and resumed conversation for a few more minutes until the morning song played for classes to begin.

**Being Something and the Performativity of Blackness**

Little Africa is most often populated by small groups of students of color throughout the day. At times, male students of color utilized the space to give a quick hug or high five between class periods. Other times they used Little Africa as a place to
resist being in places designated by their schedules such as study hall or class. Generally I observed boys of color stopping by Little Africa as a meeting place prior to wandering the building as they looked into classrooms to wave at friends and occasionally stopped by the cafeteria for a snack as lunch periods were not strictly monitored. The habit of frequently wandering the building positioned boys of color for a particular kind of visibility. First, being in a predominantly Anglo school, racial markers of difference became makers of presence. By this I mean that student of color differences from the Anglo norm became marked as a presence easily observed by other students and staff. This could be anything from the color of one’s skin to the way the student walked or spoke. Second, as the boys wandered the halls there was a natural correlation between frequency and visibility. Perhaps as a result of these factors, boys of color were frequently stopped with either a simple, “Where are you going?” or, if they were found habitually wandering, they were stopped with aggressive tones. Below is a combination of segments from one mapping session. The session with the three students lasted about 20 minutes total and begins with the boys discussing an assistant principal who, among students of color, has a reputation of hard-lined practices.

Sound File: Getting Stopped

This file is representative of what happens when male students of color were in the halls during class periods. In the case of this clip, these students were either giving up their study halls to participate in the auditory mapping part of this study or, in the case of the one student who had an early release schedule and had not yet left the building, giving up their personal time. On one hand, a student’s name was not initially included
on the pass. Additionally, this student had developed a pattern of refusing to leave school, despite his early release schedule. While his habits seemed well known and objectionable among administrators, interviews with staff members who regularly monitored the halls during that class period revealed that no formal administrative instructions to “keep an eye out” for this particular student had been specified. Further, when Anglo participants mapped the building during either the same time frame or any other time during the day, they were not stopped once during the course of the academic year. Finally, it should be noted that given a recorder and the chance to record their time in the hallway, it is possible, if not likely, that the boys actively tried to cross paths with administrators or staff. That much may have been in their control but decision to stop a student or to address him or her with harsh tones was not. Later one of the boys poignantly explained, “What is the difference between being a Black man who is stopped more by cops outside of here (school) and being stopped so much by teachers or principals inside? It’s like training for being Black in the real world!”

Sound File: Making bets

Students of color frequently vocalized their frustration with the practices of teachers who monitored the hallways. The concerns focused on the disproportionate number of stops they encountered compared to their Anglo peers rather than the inconvenience of being momentarily detained. Similarly, a significant amount of research has focused on racialized inequities in schools that are related to student arrests, punishments, and zero-tolerance policies (e.g., Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2005; Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2010; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 1992; Wald & Losen,
2003; Winn, 2011). While the consequences for a negative permanent school record or having juvenile record are certainly more detrimental to students of color than being stopped in a hallway, students in this case were nonetheless responding to what they feel to be a similar undercurrent of injustice.

The understanding that students of color were a minority was so prevalent among staff that few questioned how schooling might change if racial percentages were inversed and cultural norms varied. It should be noted that the teachers in the clip “getting stopped” were clear that they work hard to enforce policies equally, regardless of race. Further, both teachers had reputations as coaches for being hard yet fair in their roles as athletic leaders in the district. Rather than their personal views on race, what I am attending to here is a pattern that students of color encounter daily that may be unknown to staff members as a broader understanding of school culture. For example, the male staff member, Mr. DeVitis, who stopped the boys for the pass was most likely unaware of the previous encounter and certainly could not know about the imminence of the third stop. His tone, which aligned with the stern yet playful nature of many male coaches in the building, may have been perceived differently by the students who endured continuous stops in the hall. This lack of awareness of broader context aligns with the ways in which the hidden curriculum of the school proliferated in ways that were certainly raced, if not racist, by the act of carrying out official procedures that are common to schooling.

It should also be noted that while a fourth adult, Mr. Keen, could originally be heard on this file, he asked to have his portion pulled as he was afraid it sounded “too
racist” in the context of thinking about race. Upon follow up interviews with Mr. Keen, who did agree to participate in the study, he expressed his experiences as a teacher and a coach with the institutional policies, like cutting bussing or a fee of over $600 for students to play sports with no family cap, that were potentially marginalizing to students of color and certainly ostracizing to students who came from families with less lower socio-economic capital. He articulated working hard to help all students, regardless of race, but expressed frustration when students of color stereotyped themselves through their actions or gave up when peer pressure from the community pushed them toward failure.

The school-to-prison pipeline (Christle et al., 2005; Fasching-Varner, Mitchell, Martin, & Bennett-Haron, 2014) focuses on the inequities in school that negatively affect students of color and the LGBT population. Although not all marginalized students are affected by this pipeline, it does predominantly impact students of color. Specifically, students in marginalized populations tend to receive higher rates of discipline than their peers, sending them down a track toward juvenile detention and, eventually, adult forms of incarceration (Christle et al., 2005). The school-to-prison pipeline currently functions as it was “intended—to disenfranchise many (predominantly people of color) for the benefit of some (mostly white)” (Fasching-Varner et al., 2014, p. 410). As a result, racial disparities function as indicators of failure in school, encouraging racialized patterns of discipline, school funding, and pedagogical approaches (Irizarry & Raible, 2014). Additionally, schools in urban contexts tend to receive less school funding and the physical buildings tend to resemble prisons in their layout and increased security
presence (Christle et al., 2005). Although scholars who study the school-to-prison pipeline have thoroughly described the inequities in punishments, school facilities, and funding between students of color and their Anglo peers, this scholarship generally does not focus on the daily inequities and micro-aggressions (W. A. Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011) that contribute to these statistics. Whether these racialized pressures are embodied through a joke between friends (e.g., audio file: “Making Bets”) or internalized more strongly after being removed from a context despite a legitimate pass (e.g., audio file: “Getting Stopped”), the pipeline often begins in the minutia of the everyday.

Further, as discussed in the literature review, the enacted curriculum resides in affective tensions that are embodied within the negotiations of sociocultural contexts. The interactions between staff and students of color in these moments are therefore not only tied to the daily experiences that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline but also, and as importantly, to the enacted curriculum of the school. Here, rather than how it is often utilized at a classroom level, I am using enacted curriculum at the school level. As such, in these particular corridors, an enacted curriculum of racial profiling occurred daily. As the enacted curriculum involves all participants, it should be noted that students of color were not passive and, as it is discussed below, contributed to this curriculum through their daily performativity of Blackness.

Because this pedagogy of injustice is often enacted in public places (the main halls), it affects not only student of color epistemologies but also those of their Anglo peers. While it does not demonstrate what Anglos cannot do, for they can do the very things that their African American or bi-racial peers do without getting into trouble—a
point to which I return later in this chapter—it does contribute to an understanding of students of color as likely either “bad” or “in trouble” and Anglo students as “good” (Gershon, 2007).

“This Ain’t an After School Special on the Niggas”: Being, Masculinity, and Little Africa

Without something to belong to, we have no stable self, and yet total commitment and attachment to any social unit implies a kind of selflessness. Our sense of being a person can come from being drawn into a wider social unit; our sense of selfhood can arise through the little ways in which we resist the pull. Our status is backed by the solid buildings of the world, while our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks. (Goffman, 1961, p. 320)

There are many groups that congregate after school in Little Africa. While Anglo students and staff tend to classify all students of color as a part of Little Africa, clear lines tend to exist between clusters of students (e.g., audio file “students”). These groups often mingle, like one or two boys splitting off to talk with the group of girls, but they generally remain as separate entities with/in a larger alliance between students of color.

This section more closely considers the ebb and flow of Little Africa in the afternoon. It is divided into two groups by gender in order to walk through the nested layers of in-group differences as well as the complications of being themselves that each group faces within the school.

Due to the size of the building, students who spent their mornings together in Little Africa disbanded for the first bell and were dispersed throughout the school during
the day. Often during the final class period, students who had an early release schedule began to congregate by the stairs. Some of these students worked in the few hours they were off of school, some briefly left school property and returned, and some managed to stay in the building and avoid detection until end of the day. Additionally, some students were coming in for night school that began in the early evening in the green wing of the building. This group was almost entirely African American or biracial boys and the deep lull of their conversation was often punctuated by laughter or the squeal of tennis shoes as they shoved each other for masculine displays that frequently interrupted the discussions. After the final bell rang, the halls became quickly crowded and their voices were drowned out by the mass of humanity that moves around the group. Small groups of two or three students of color joined this initial group and Little Africa swelled to a size that was twice as large in the afternoon as it was in the morning.

Closest to the exit a group of about 15 male students of color met regularly. The group generally stayed close to the wall where the gym doors are located. Male athletes often greeted their friends, stayed to talk for a minute, and then quickly ducked into the gym to change their clothes for after school sports. After a moment, they reappeared in athletic clothes or uniforms and stood with the main group until practice began. Non-athletes often ventured as far as the doorway of the gym, sometimes pushing each other in as a joke, but generally stayed within the confines of the hallway. As discussed in detail in the literature review, cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) is a kind of social asset that promotes sociocultural mobility. In the case of male students of color, participating in athletics garnered a strong cultural capital not only between group
members but within the school in general. At times an athlete would tease a student who has been pushed into the gym with a comment, like Johnathan’s remark to Jahmir, “What the fuck, man? I don’t see you on the court! What makes you think you can be up in my place, bitch?” Occasionally a student would take off into the gym and a quick scuffle would result from these comments. More often the student would take his frustration out on the individual who initially pushed him by reciprocating with forceful shove. These minor altercations usually ended quickly and did not result in any further escalations.

In the case of this school, the athletic program was not only prominently endorsed by the administration and staff but was also greatly respected by the general student body. Each year, for example, the halls of the four academic wings were decorated for homecoming week. While each class (e.g., 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades) was able to participate in the decorations, the annual theme of Homecoming must also be represented with an athletic undercurrent. Similarly, when the school brought in an annual motivational speaker, athletic coaches could pick a student representative to participate in a private session but the school’s clubs do not benefit from this activity. Finally, even the large hall where Little Africa was located was covered with pictures of athletes and athletic teams who had made state championships in the history of the school. It was called the “wall of fame” and the photos of the athletes on the wall were particularly guarded by the administration and valued by the students. For example, any defacement of the photos would certainly warrant immediate punishment but the “N” word written on the “Bridgeport” sign under which students of color remained un-noticed throughout the study (see Figure 3).
The cultural capital garnered by participation in athletics was openly noted by some male students of color who explained that while they were as likely as their non-athletic peers to be stopped or get into trouble they knew the trouble would be less severe if they were athletes. Da’von, for example, noted/said,

It’s crazy, you know? The better I am in the field, the less trouble I can get into. Not because what they think. They think it’s because I’m spending my time in sports and not with the thugs. Those “thugs” are my family. I grew up with them. I do the same shit as those kids sometimes. It’s just because they (administration) view us as a cut above the rest. You know, the Black kid making something of himself . . . That and they wouldn’t want to mess up Friday night football.

During the afternoon, the athletic cultural capital that enabled athletes of color to move freely between the hallway and the gym constrained their non-athletic peers to particular places. Although it is not the focus of this study, it should be noted that
athletes of color articulated facing a high degree of pressure, particularly when they were the only athlete of color on a team. Additionally, several students enumerated the ways in which they felt their presence on sports teams was generally unwanted; particularly if their talents were surpassed by their Anglo peers. Whether it was through peer pressure or bureaucratic means (hear last audio file), student athletes of color explained feelings of exclusion and anxiety that came along with the cultural capital of being an athlete.

In the case of cultural capital through athletics, what is worthy of note here is how such capital can function as enabling for the athletes while being constraining for others (e.g., non-athletes of color). This is significant for at least the following reasons. First, while scholars like Eckert (1989) have well explicated the cultural replication of identities that exists between “athletes” and “burnouts,” the notion that these mutually exclusive, co-dependent constructions are equally an expression of cultural capital is often overlooked.

Second, this cultural capital (un)intentionally creates not only sociocultural borders and boundaries (Helfenbein, 2010) to non-athletic students of color but, in the case of after school spaces between the gym and the hall, it cements physical boundaries as well. While literature has focused on the material consequences and affective tensions of borders and boundaries (e.g., Anzaldúa, Cantú, & Hurtado, 1987; Harvey, 1973; Menon, 1998), little attention has been paid to in group differences that subdivide the subaltern (Spivak, 1988), resulting in physical borders and additional sociocultural boundaries for these groups. While these boundaries are socially constructed by students of color who interact in Little Africa, as the administration did not actively enforce
non-athletic restriction on the gym, the social awareness of these lines is enacted in ways that are as material as the door that divides the two places. Finally, a point that is raised in detail later in this chapter, it should be noted that while administration and cameras leave Little Africa under constant surveillance, the gym offers a degree of privacy afforded to athletes of color. Additionally, when the administration had to clear the hallway for events like staff meetings, they frequently turned right and cleared the portion of the hall near Little Africa by asking students loudly to leave before turning left to clear the section closer to them with predominantly Anglo students. Although they may have been generally unaware of this decision, they were consistent in their choice to interrupt the socializing of one group before the other. The gym often offered a quick escape from this interruption because as they noted administrators yell loudly to students to leave, athletes often ducked into the gym for a moment, returning to the hall a few minutes later when the coast was clear.

**Aggression, Urbanness, and Signifyin(g)**

The group of boys of color was further divided according to where they live in the greater high school community. The city itself is fairly segregated with the majority of families of color living in two areas, Hawks Corner, an apartment complex, and Smithville Street, an area consisting of mainly bungalow style homes that is just a block from Hawks Corner. For the most part, students who resided in the apartments were raised in the community whereas students who lived in the houses have generally moved in from neighboring, larger urban centers. It is important to note that class differences between suburban and urban students tended to be an inversion of sociocultural ideas
about class and urban understandings. By this I mean that students who have lived in the suburbs often come from families that have less economic capital than those students who have moved from city spaces—students who relocated from nearby cities had the funds and accompanying socioeconomic status to do so. Although the economic context of participants’ families was not explored in this study, students who shared spending most of their childhood in urban contexts and moved to the suburbs largely shared the privilege of being economically mobile in ways that students of suburban families did not.

The class division between suburban and urban male students of color often raised questions of identity as it related to class and perceptions of masculinity. However, despite any fervor that boys approached their hostilities, these disagreements were often tabled during and immediately after school hours. For example, throughout the school year, only one fight between students of color broke out in Little Africa; in this case, a student from Hawks Corner who had gotten a girl pregnant. Her cousin, a night school student at the high school and resident of Smithville, came in early to settle the score. Students were aware of the impending fight and readily recorded it with their cell phones but did not step in to assist either party. While several threats of further acts of violence circulated, they rarely transpired—this fight was in many ways the exception that underscored the construction of Little Africa as a safe space for (male) students of color.

Young’s (1990) discussion on oppression is important to this discussion on violence. Similar to Varenne and McDermott’s (1998) arguments on in-group difference always being greater than between-group difference, Marion Young explicated the
formation of groups within cultural contexts and societies. She continued by explaining that oppression, a tool both produced and maintained between groups as well as within groups, has five faces. Aligning with much of Freire’s (1970) work on oppression, she explained these five faces are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

As further explicated in this chapter as well as the following chapter, violence from outside the group was often verbal. However, although the tensions in group between Hawks Corner and Smithville predominantly existed in verbal confrontation, physical challenges for power did exist. However, as Amani and other students often explained, because the school culture essentialized students of color as “just another Black kid,” Little Africa became a safe space against a racialized institution and systemic violence between students of color and Anglo students and staff. It was identified as a safe space against in-group violence because it existed as a place where their ways of being could comfortably cut across sociocultural ideas or ideals on race.

An example of this reluctance to come to blows occurred well after school one afternoon. As the group in Little Africa dwindled, I returned to my room to prepare for the next day. Returning to Little Africa about 40 minutes later I found about 10 boys from Hawks Corner crammed between the space between the outer and inner doors to exit the building. Every few minutes a boy would shout out, “Fine! I’m no pussy! I’m just going to leave!” He would take a step out of the first door and then quickly return to the safety of the vestibule. Their movements, like a group of penguins, seemed to offer a
kind of protection in numbers, jostling each other until one fell out of the group to test the safety of the waters.

I pulled Jahmir, a generally talkative freshman, aside and inquired about the situation. He pointed to the far side of the parking lot. Barely off of the school’s property, in the direction the Hawks Corner boys would walk to get home, waited about five boys from Smithville. He explained that as a joke one boy from Hawks Corner had taken the tennis shoes of a boy from Smithville after gym class. I reported the incident to an administrator left in the building and was told that if it “was not on school property, it was not something in the school’s control.” To be clear, this decision to be in-active during a moment that could have potentially been an issue of safety for youth as an administrator further reinscribed an administrative racialized positionality. When I returned to Little Africa, they boys had left the building.

The next morning Jahmir informed me that no fight had occurred. He explained that both sides decided to “go home and rap about it.” Following historical traditions of using hip hop to diffuse potentially physically violent situations (Dimitriadis, 2009; Ibrahim, 2014; Land & Stovall, 2009; Rose, 1991), students of color in this context were writing rap songs and posting them on YouTube to serve as an intermediary.

Sound File: Mobbin’

While the intent of their songwriting was to express disagreement in a non-physically aggressive manner, the result of the music was twofold. First, the boys’ songs functioned in ways not dissimilar to signifyin(g) (Caponi, 1999; Gates, 1988; G. Jones, 1991) and other artistic expressions from people of African dissent (Ibrahim,
In this case, unlike aspects of hip hop that often escalated tension and violence (Ibrahim, 2014; Land & Stovall, 2009; Rose, 1991), the boys’ songs acted as a proxy for potential face to face altercations. It also served as a kind of release valve for in-group tensions, primarily between African American males in Little Africa. This allowed those who would otherwise have to physically demonstrate their aggravations to coexist in relatively peaceful ways during and after school.

The consistent threat of violence among male students of color was more broadly framed by questions of identity. For example, all boys, regardless of where they were raised, seemed to follow norms and values that were set by family, school, and community, as well as broader media induced ideas and ideals of Blackness (Dimitriadis, 2009; Ibrahim, 2014; G. Jones, 1991; Noguera, 2003; Tatum, 2003). However, the boys both vocalized and physically demonstrated the inherent tension between students whose identities and experiences aligned with urban contexts and those whose identities were often a performance of the urban.

Sound File: Not Weak

Male students of color in this case were not just (re)acting in performative ways that reiterated sociocultural norms through which questions of male Blackness have been constituted (Butler, 1993; Inda, 2000; Tatum, 2003) but they were inter-acting within their daily presentations of self (Goffman, 1959). As heard in the previous sound file, the boys are were not only performing iterations of Blackness but also making arguments for what defines Blackness. In this case it was a question of strength being attributed to race and masculinity. While questions of performativity and performance are often centered
on identity is it relates to power, as well as the discursive versus the material (Butler, 1993; Inda, 2000), Goffman’s (1959) *Presentations of Self in Everyday Life* is applied here to describe the agency that students had in deciding which version of themselves to present as well as the multiplicity of angles, contexts, and audiences that are involved in these presentations.

**Acting White/Being Black**

Sound File: [Adapting](https://example.com)

Sound File: [Expectations of Blackness](https://example.com)

Explicit and implicit messages in the school dictated acceptable patterns of speech that urban students of color were pressured to follow. As John, a suburban student of color, explained,

> They (Anglo students and staff) are always out to get you, no matter what you do. Might as well be what they expect. Act the way they want. At least that way you can fit in with the other Black kids.

Despite the pressure to “act White,” in order to adapt to a predominantly white institution (Davis et al, 2004; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014; Wozolek, 2014), or to “act Black,” with the intention of conforming to in-group ideals (Carbado, 2013; Tatum, 2003; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012), students of color were aware of both how and when they decided to enact a particular performance of self. Goffman (1959) used the image of a theater to discuss the performance of self which are the ways that local actors can perform different versions of self, with a high degree of agency as to the “costume” and interactions used in this presentation. As noted above, this is but one
example of the agency students enact in their everyday ways of being as a part of a broader performance.

Part of the performance of “acting Black” was beneficial for all male students of color, regardless of athletic or urban status. When approached by Anglo peers or teachers who seemed intimidated by race and/or gender, the boys often commented that the performance of Blackness earned the group more physical space within Little Africa. For example, in the beginning of the year there were several occasions where Anglo freshman boys would approach the group of boys of color and ask racialized, purposefully provoking questions like, “How did I wind up in the Black hole of the school?” or, “When did our school get so ghetto?” The boys would often respond by partially surrounding the questioner and, with a grace that seemed rehearsed, one boy (generally a junior or senior), would step forward and say something like, “You wanna mess wid a nigga? You gotta mess wid all the niggas or, if you want, you can jus’ pick me . . .” The fear of “the violent Black man” as Brad, an Anglo student explained, was enough to back down. By the end of the first quarter, few Anglo students stepped forward to ask these questions and the group as a whole received a wide berth in the hall as students filed out of the building.

Despite racial in-group differences, boys tend toward African American stereotypes. For example, one afternoon Alejandro, a bi-racial (White-Latino) student was upset. He had gotten in trouble for using the “n” word. He was upset because he had called himself that, explaining he had said to a girl that he was a “badass nigga.” I asked again how he identified himself and he again stated, “half White, half Mexican.”
said, “Can you explain to me the use of that word to describe yourself?” He said with confidence, “Well I guess I’m one, right? Aren’t we all in Little Africa?” It should also be noted that “acting White” or “acting Black” falls under a particular set of sociocultural ideas and ideals that are negotiated daily, especially in sociocultural institutions like schools. Specifically, studies have demonstrated that the burden of “acting White” is pervasive in the Black community. Further, these racialized understandings of the way students act has been established as influencing how schools react to questions of achievement and discipline for students of color (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005). Rather than essentializing people by what it means to “be Black” or “be White,” here I am using the terms only to explicate practices by students of color that involve “relations between the past and individual agents’ interpretations, inscriptions, and revisions of that past in present . . . practice” (Drewal, 1992, p. xiv). As it is discussed later in detail, this is a performance of negotiation between self, lived experience, and all factors of the present context (Goffman, 1959). It is significant to note that the students of color in this context are teenagers. During these years of adolescence, all youth are particularly prone to explorations of identity that can be difficult, confusing, and overwhelming. As is often true for all marginalized student populations (see Quinn & Meiners, 2009; Tatum, 2003; Valente, 2011; Varenne & McDermott, 1998), what can be naturally challenging time for all teenagers becomes all the more tenuous for traditionally marginalized groups like students of color as they further separate oppressive sociocultural ideals from common questions of identity.
Finally, the time that males of color spent in Little Africa served as a moment to unpack the inequities that they faced in the everyday of schooling. As can be heard in the sound files, conversations ranged from dating to the social conditions from the classroom to the corridor.

Sound File: Dating White Girls

Sound File: Snapback

Sound File: Halloween

While these topics demonstrate the multiple ways male students of color are marginalized in their daily interactions at school, the desire to share this information with other male students of color after school is significant. Although in-group difference was substantial enough to warrant physical and verbal confrontations, the need to unpack daily oppressions often outweighs these differences among the boys. What was often most significant about these conversations, that existed in similar forms for both boys and girls of color, was the consistent critique about being that other students of color offered each other. Critiques ranged from how to “be Black” without becoming “too White,” ways to avoid trouble in school and how to be female or male and still be culturally accepted both in and between groups. Information was often passed from elder to younger students. By this I mean that students who were established in the school (e.g., upperclassmen) tended to give out information to younger students about how to act, where to be in the school, or how to avoid trouble. This was not dependent on questions of social class. However, when it came to issues of physical altercations, students who were raised in urban contexts often fielded questions of self-defense.
This is not dissimilar to scholarship on non-Western schooling and oral traditions that honored in-group voice and the dissemination of knowledge and questions of identity through multiple sets of group and individual histories (Au, 1980; Barnhardt, 2005; Fixico, 2003; Kaomea, 2005; McCarthy, Wallace, Lynch & Benally, 1991; Watkins, 2010). This is not to say that African Americans necessarily share cultural markers of Yoruban Nigerians (for example) as they share in many ways “Western” or “American” identities. I am particularly acknowledging here a way of disseminating knowledge that exists outside of texts or curricula deemed relevant to the structure of schooling. I am attending to an understanding that oral histories are as formal and relevant as texts. As discussed in the literature review, the formal curriculum is the intended knowledge that students gain in schools (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995). Yet, the formal curriculum is not always created within the confines of the classroom and in this case students of color passed their knowledge within the safety of corridor spaces and places.

Just Chillin’ or Stealing?

Although Little Africa provided inroads to a sense of community for boys of color, several interviews with various administrators rendered a very different perspective about the group. As heard earlier in the sound file “administration,” the majority of administrators shared the opinion that students spent time in Little Africa not only for a sense of community but as an escape from difficult home lives. One administrator explained that besides offering a distraction from going home, time in Little Africa invited the opportunity for students of color to steal valuables from the unlocked lockers of athletes. When I asked about the frequency of such thefts, the administrator recalled
only one specific incident but continually insisted that students of color who were not in athletics or school sanctioned activities specifically viewed this time after school as an opportunity to commit such crimes. Another administrator explained that the school did not have an issue with racism and that “words like the N-word are not used in the building . . . but the word cracker has been used recently,” therefore suggesting that students using time in Little Africa to unpack such offenses was not a necessary part of the day. This not-so-implicit claim of reverse racism proactively defended Anglo students’ actions against such offenses by students of color. Finally, a third administrator expressed concern with students of color spending time in the building after school, hoping that “a policy to clear the building can be put in place before something terrible happens.”

It is important to note that all the administrators interviewed for this study seemed to view the private lives of students of color with a degree of pity, and some even acknowledged the racist epistemologies of the Anglo student body. As administrators un-intentionally positioned themselves at the intersection of White privilege and a shield of past experiences (e.g., working or living in urban settings, diverse social contexts or parental upbringing) they often carried out racialized structural inequities in schooling with seemingly limited awareness of the consequences for students of color. The ignorance of administrators that reinscribed such inequities (like limited awareness of derogatory terms in the school, normalized associations of students of color with crime or increased punitive measures for students of color) translated into negative self-perception
by students of color as well as essentialized perceptions of students of color by Anglo students and staff.

Critical Race scholars have now strongly established Whiteness as a form of property (Harris, 1993). Similar to Bourdieu’s (1993) discussion on cultural capital and Mills’ (1998) work on social ontology, Whiteness as property posits the capital of being Anglo as central not only to sociocultural values but also as intrinsic to historically legalized racism (Harris, 1993; Haynes Writer, 2008; Leonardo, 2002; Orozco, 2011). Scholars in the field of education have argued that Whiteness as property permeates the structure of schooling through policies and practices like tracking, high stake testing and curricular standardization (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Haynes Writer, 2008; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Specifically, if “Whiteness” is a desirable trait through actions and ways of being, it is something to possess. As heard in the sound files above, adapting and expectations of Blackness, acting White for students of color included things like changing vernacular or, as Rynnelle stated, “trying overly hard to be something that you’re not.” As discussed in the section below about girls, this could be extended to attending to Anglo behaviors of both femininity and masculinity. However, while it is understood that Whiteness is a property that is often socioculturally and legally engendered and enforced, little work has been done on the policies and procedures that maintain Anglo cultural capital through the everyday experiences in the corridors of schools. Here I am arguing that the everyday normalization of Whiteness that allowed administrators to be openly racist and use pity as a means to continue to further enact racist policies and procedures. Underlying these processes and procedures
is a not-so-hidden curriculum where students of color are not only as Other but as a danger that needs to be controlled and suppressed.

In conclusion, the everyday experiences of boys of color within Bridgeport High School existed at the intersections of identity, sociocultural norms, and ways of being and knowing. Their performances of self were encouraged if not expected by Anglo students and staff through the hidden curriculum. When boys of color forgot their positionalities or over played their roles in the underlife they often found themselves in trouble with the administration and staff. A salient example is heard in the sound file below, “because I hugged her,” from John. As John explains, he was in Little Africa after school with two Anglo, female students. As girls of color later explained, these females were known for dating Black boys in the school. When John asked the one girl for food and she denied his request, he stole several of her chips. As she became angry, he asked for forgiveness and hugged her. His unwanted physical advances resulted in a rape accusation, his expulsion, and a trial in juvenile court. Although administration was finished watching the hall for the afternoon, it should be noted that the footage from all the cameras in the hall was initially missing to confirm John’s innocence, something he discusses with frustration in the file. While the boys in Little Africa were under constant surveillance by cameras, administration, or staff, when convenient, that supervision failed, leaving males to negotiate spaces and places as a group or alone. Although it should be noted that it is never acceptable for girls, regardless of race, to experience unwanted sexual advances, what I am attending to here is on one hand, John’s confusion when the script was flipped...
with a girl that he felt was “safe” within the group, how the administration reacted to his flirtation with the Anglo girls, and how parents of color reacted to this event.

Situations like these were not uncommon as boys of color negotiated their social capital and ultimately reached their ontological ceilings. After the incident, both girls and boys of color reported family discussions around the event. For boys, these discussions often focused around themes of why the boys should have listened to parents’ or guardians’ warnings about staying away from Anglo girls. Girls of color reported having serious discussions that served as a reminder about the value of a girl of color. As Shay explained,

My dad just told me to remember this moment. That if this is how boys are treated for messin’ with a White girl, they don’t give a damn ‘bout what happens to me as a Black girl if a White boy messes with me.

As discussed with Emma’s narrative on sexual assault in the following section, I could not argue Shay’s point. Similarly, as the next section explores, girls of color faced similar complications of the everyday or, as the girls explained in the sound file “because I’m Black,” the friction they caused to sociocultural norms and values was not only based on the color of their skin but also their gender.

Sound File: Because I Hugged Her

Sound File: Because I’m Black

“And That’s My Struggle Bus”: Being and Blackness for Girls

Sound File: Singing
While the pressures that female students of color faced were different than those of male students of color, parallel themes that were often related to questions of race were consistent throughout the study. For example, males felt disproportionately targeted for punishments like detentions and suspensions that are consistent with discussions of the school-to-prison pipeline (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000). Girls, on the other hand, felt more targeted for infractions like breaking the dress code (Morris, 2005) or being disruptive (Fordham, 1993; N. Jones, 2009; Lei, 2003). However students of color, regardless of gender, reported several encounters with racist bullying, feelings of surveillance by administrators or staff, and social exclusion through clubs or athletics. While boys expressed their resentment toward their treatment from the school community openly, girls were equally as disturbed but ultimately less likely to report these incidents either to me or the administration.

Because girls were less likely to openly share information, this section functions to practically support and complicate the previous portion regarding experiences recorded by and about the male students of color in Little Africa. My intention here is not to disregard the significant lived experiences of female students of color. Likewise, nor is it to define either group by the other. However during their time in Little Africa, girls generally kept their distance and were reluctant to report in-group interactions. Although I formed strong relationships with female participants, their interviews and maps focused mainly on daily experiences during school rather than those that occurred before or after school hours in Little Africa. For example, while the written and audio maps created by students all produced a kind of narrative cartography of the school, girls’ maps generally
attended to social spaces and interactions while boys’ maps focused on physical places (see Figure 4). This is not to falsely split spaces and places, an idea I thoroughly attended to in the literature review and earlier in this chapter. However, what I am attending to here is the imbricated and yet separate ways that girls and boys thought of and mapped the spaces and places they occupied during school.

While boys of color used Little Africa as a place to meet prior to wandering the hall during the school day, girls often used the restrooms near Little Africa to hide out and avoid detection. One salient example occurred as I was walking through the building during my own lunch to observe school culture during class periods. Upon passing by the girl’s restroom by Little Africa, I heard a rich soprano voice resounding within the tiled walls as she sang “Royals” by Lorde. After a moment, I heard the following conversation interrupt the unaccompanied voice.

Caerra: (singing) . . . And I’m not proud of my address, in a torn-up town, no postcard envy. . .

Stephanie: Damn, what the fuck are you doing? You’re going to get us busted!

Rynnelle: So? At least she got it. It’s nice. Plus, she’s makin’ the place better.

Caerra: Uhh, yeah, bitch. I make this place pretty. Ain’t nothin’ else pretty around us. Besides, we jus’ cuttin’ lunch. Who da fuuuuck cares?

Anyway, don’t you know . . . (resumes singing) We’ll never be royals!

Rynnelle: (laughing)

Stephanie: Fuck this, I’m leaving.
Figure 4. Maps drawn by girls of color to depict important spaces and places in the school

This instance is helpful because it not only makes their choice of safe place expressly visible but also because several girls articulated using the restrooms by Little Africa not only as an extension of Little Africa but as a place to “hide away but still be around.” While the girls in the restroom may have been using the space in this context to cut class, it was also considered a “safe space” for some girls of color in the group. The
fact that all students of color explicated the idea that Little Africa existed in the cafeteria in the morning and in the hallway at other times of the day and that none of the students discussed these restrooms in terms of “Little Africa” is significant. It means that in many ways the restroom provided a “safe space” for girls of color away from the previously established borders of Little Africa. This means that, as is argued later in the chapter, girls of color had to create “safe spaces” in which their bodies were completely absent from the main borders in order to have an unrestrained space for their ways of being.

For example, in one interview, Emma, a quiet bi-racial student who often kept to herself, revealed that she had been sexually assaulted\(^8\) by her Anglo boyfriend during the quarter. She was afraid of what would happen if she pressed charges and so, while her parents and the school were aware of the crime and she was receiving counseling through a rape crisis center, she refused to make a formal report. However, Emma still had to endure several classes a day with her assailant, including lunch and study hall. Adding further insult to literal bodily harm, according to Emma, the boy made several remarks during lunch about the assault and, feeling fearful and unsafe, she found herself eating meals in the restroom near Little Africa. She would later become an official aide in my classroom to avoid eating in such an unsanitary context but at the time she explained that the restroom was the only place she could “feel safe in the school.” The decision to become a classroom aide during this period was at her request, presumably as a result of the relationships I built in both my role as a teacher and a researcher thinking with her

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\(^8\) For me, part of the tension between simultaneously being a researcher and teacher was making decisions about reportable information. Given the nature of this information, a report was made to the proper mental health and law enforcement authorities. In addition, because it was so sensitive, I double checked with the participant to make sure she was comfortable with the inclusion of these details.
through questions of schooling. It is of no small significance that girls of color actively
selected restrooms as a safe space in the underlife of their school (see Goffman, 1961).
As discussed earlier, this underlife refers to the ways that local actors resist overarching
sociopolitical and cultural structures to facilitate their ways of being within an institution.

The girls’ decision to use this restroom as a safe space is practically wise for at
least the following reasons. First, it is an area that offers privacy that is outside the
observation of the school cameras. Offices, classrooms, and restrooms are the only areas
of the building that are afforded this privacy. Second, as there is only one female
administrator who often attends meetings in the central office or on the white side of the
school, the restrooms are generally impervious to administrator interruption.
Additionally, because it is located in the main hall, this restroom sits on the outside wall
of the academic wing, lowering the possibility of female staff members questioning their
presence. This means that the classrooms existed in their own annexed square that could
be closed off through a set of doors that led to the main hallway. Finally, this restroom is
socially advantageous as it is the closest restroom to Little Africa, creating a close
proximity to the place where the boys often meet up during class periods before
wandering the building. While girls of color did not discuss the use of the restroom
through visual or auditory maps, boys often noted the girls’ restroom as a notable
location (see Figure 1). Overall, while students used Little Africa and surrounding
locations throughout the day as cover to avoid student responsibilities (class) or personal
crises, girls tended to find locations like restrooms as a stable base to evade detection. As
a result when girls were in the hall, either to wander or for activities like mapping the building, they were rarely stopped.

**Too Curvy For School: Yoga Pants and Being in Little Africa**

Within Little Africa, boys of color generally took up far more acoustic and physical space than the girls. As Tara explained,

(Anglo) people expect that boys act like niggas. Clownin’ around, making fools outta themselves. Girls, it’s different for us. We gotta be like White girls. If we’re loud, we’re ignorant or not living up to our potential. Boys only have one way to be. We have the way we are and then the way we’re expected to be, ya know? But it doesn’t really matter ‘cause at the end, you’ll never actually be *White*. And who we are will never be accepted. It’s just damn impossible.

Krista, a fairly studious African American sophomore, echoed Tara’s explanation when asked, “Do you feel they (Anglo teachers and peers) expect you to behave a certain way?”

The girls’ enumeration of a sociocultural set of “acceptable behaviors” for female students of color on one hand emphasizes the double bind of one’s ontology being considered socially unacceptable while simultaneously being expected to work toward unattainable ways of being. As discussed below, these gender norms often meant girls were expected to adhere to Anglo femininities in order to be considered acting “properly” within the school context. Though it should be noted that all girls in the school faced the challenge of these expectations, girls of color were particularly marginalized by the double bind of both race and gender. On the other hand, it underscores the narrow,
predefined understandings of boys’ ontologies. In terms of space, these understandings of acceptable behaviors often translated to girls of color speaking quietly while performing acts of their “best behavior” as they stood in tightly packed circles after school. Inversely, as discussed above, the image of boisterous, potentially violent boys of color, Anglo students often gave the boys more physical room to “just be” in Little Africa.

**Being Strong, Being Woman**

Apart from brief moments where girls, often in groups of two, would break apart from their circle to talk or flirt with boys of color, girls’ movements were fairly confined. For example, female athletes of color often used the restroom near Little Africa to change for sports rather than, like their athletic male counterparts, disappearing momentarily to the locker room and resurfacing dressed in athletic wear. Additionally, girls often waited longer to change, getting ready only moments before the practice began and moving quickly to court or field. When asked to describe themselves, girls of color identified less strongly with their athletic abilities, describing their participation in athletics less openly or enthusiastically than male athletes of color. The following interview with Caitlyn is but one example of the ways in which female athletes of color often minimized their participation in athletics.

**BW:** To help me get a better understanding of what makes you, well, you, tell me how you would describe yourself?

**Caitlyn:** Umm . . . I dunno. I’m a girl. And I’m black. And a student . . . That’s me, I guess.
BW: Okay . . . What are you good at? What do you like to do? What don’t you like to do?

Caitlyn: Umm . . . I have a boyfriend this year! And, ummm, I’m ok at school. Plus, I’m a good friend cuz I don’t snitch, ever. And I play tennis but I’m not on varsity.

While Caitlyn’s decision to begin her list of what she feels good about by sharing her excitement of a new boyfriend could as easily be chalked up to more general teen understandings or one of many other possibilities, it is her framing of athletics I wish to focus on here. As previously heard in the sound file “unwanted,” female athletes often expressed multiple sources of pressure to drop their participation in athletics. Some identified that coaches did not take them seriously, regardless of their actual athletic ability. Other girls articulated a double standard where Black female athletes were at once considered “too masculine” for their participation in sports while being asked frequently by their Anglo peers if they were athletically advantaged because of their race.

For girls of color, the double bind created at the intersection of race and gender consistently pushed at their identities while strengthening a bond that many of the girls identified as existing because of their race and gender. As Raquel poignantly explained:

The boys got their thing to belong to—Hawks or Smithville. We don’t. We can ride with one group but we’re never gonna be, like, with the group. They can do a sport or not. I can be on the court but can’t have too many muscles. I can be hot. You know I can wear heels and a skirt and look goo-oood! But I’ll always get
called down to the office while some skinny-assed White girl shows off more than me. We [girls of color] have less we can be so we got to be together.

This is not to say that girls of color somehow avoided in-group disputes. However their arguments held through social media outlets, much like their decision to use the restrooms to skip class rather than wandering the halls, were privately situated within larger public contexts. During the study, disagreements between girls did not result in physical violence. Similarly, other students in the study could only recall one fight in recent history between girls of color. However, in-group stories about this fight did not focus on precipitating factors that led to the conflict but rather on reactions from their Anglo peers about the event. When heated tweets, Facebook posts, or Instagram pictures erupted into verbal disputes among the group, the subject of the argument was often about boys and dating. However it should be noted that these disputes seemed prevalent among all girls as they played into female stereotypes in general.

Girls frequently communicated feelings of anxiety about limited dating prospects as they consistently felt rejected by both Anglo male peers and male students of color. As heard in sound file “Dating White Girls,” boys of color also consistently struggled with interracial dating but rarely felt rejected by girls of color. However, when boys of color dated Anglo girls, it was often discussed as the Anglo girl going through a “wild phase” or “having jungle fever” by their peers and by parents in the community. When girls of color dated Anglo boys, discussions by students or parents (as relayed by students) focused on how the boy could not “get a nice White girl” or ended up with “Black trash.”
These reactions to interracial relationships in the school were significant to the students of color for at least the following reasons. First, they were highly gendered, one reaction expressed in the “exotic” of the Black male body while the other shamed the Black female body or viewed it as less than. Second, they were a form of racialized othering that affectively impacted all students of color, regardless of their gender. However, while boys of color were free to pursue girls of color, the girls often felt their advances were chided.

Sound File: If You Were a White Girl

Sound File: Slave Feet

This sound file resonates with several girls’ experiences as they struggled to find romantic companionship with male peers, regardless of race. In particular the second track, “slave feet,” points to questions of femininity as well as the othering of gender and race within a racial group. Some girls called their experiences around dating, the lack of acceptance of their ways of being, and their bodies a “struggle bus.” When pressed as to why a “bus,” the girls explained they needed a larger vehicle to house their “struggles”—that it was their lot in life to just “drive the bus and deal with the struggles.” Girls of color were therefore subjected to Anglo norms and values not only with questions of appropriate behavior but also Anglo ideals of beauty. As Shay explained, “My ass ain’t skinny enough for a White boy and no Black boy wants a mocha queen.” Further, girls often articulated that unless their hair was relaxed, boys of color, and Anglo students would make comments about a girl being “ratchet,” or denoting low SES. As Shay explained, this was in contrast with the fact that many boys of color could wear their hair
in “fros or rows” without a problem but a girl had one style that was considered attractive (Figure 5). Boys of color in this case strongly contributed to marginalization of girls of color and the double-bind of being “of color” and “female” that the girls experienced. This is significant to note as the feelings of oppression that girls faced came not only from their Anglo peers or staff but also from male students of color within their community. However, girls often played into these ideas and ideals about femininity not only to garner further attention from males of color and Anglo boys but to pass among the Anglo population.

Figure 5. Matthew with afro, headphones and pick

The denigration of Black female bodies extended beyond issues of romance and into questions of the dress code. For example, one spring afternoon I was walking through the main hall after a staff meeting. The track team had unrolled a mat for hurdles practice indoors and as they stretched, four girls of color were using a section of the mat
as a runway. One called out to me, “Hey! Woz! Check out this strut and you tell me if there is anything wrong with what I’m wearing!” She straightened herself up and with her best model impression she strutted my way a few steps, one hand on her hip, the other swinging lightly beside her. When she was a few feet away she smiled, tossed her hair and walked a few steps in the opposite direction. I casually asked, “Do you want to explain what all that was about?” She sighed angrily and explained that she had been given a detention for wearing leggings to school but that she was wearing boots so, according to the school rule, she should be permitted to wear the leggings.

This was a loophole in the dress code that many girls, regardless of race, liked to manipulate. The rule was that all pants that are not of denim material must flair out at the leg. Girls often wore boots over leggings, challenging teachers that there was no way to know if the pants had a flare. However, despite attempts to thwart dress code rules in the name of fashion, many girls, independent of race, complained about administrative and staff attempts to prohibit the style. Although she had boisterously pointed out that four other girls (all Anglo) in the class were also wearing leggings and boots, she was still sent to the office. In the office she was told that the style was viewed as more sexual “on girls like [her] than others.” In her indignation, she explained that the teacher was probably just “jealous because she has no ass to show off.” Other girls quickly broke in with statements like “So a White girl wears it and it’s just fine. But a Black girl wears it and suddenly it’s sexual?” This kind of racialized understanding of the girls’ bodies strongly contributed to a hidden curriculum of the “exotic,” which underscored the double-bind of
a racial and female consciousness that girls of color often iterated during maps and interviews.

Further, the girls of color often vocalized their discontent about being penalized for their appearance as the female administrator often wore form fitting dresses and skirts that broke student dress code policies. As more than one student observed this administrator being called a “babe” by the male administrators over the two-way radios, the group often vented their frustration of not only the kind of role model she provided but also the more general acceptance of her appearance by her male colleagues.

Here the girls are responding to the multiple, negative ways that their bodies were exoticized. In other words, girls could not be in school without living as the exotic, often sexualized other. Their choices, clear down to pants that Anglo students could comfortably wear, were noticed as difference and regarded with a particular kind of sexual significance. As girls were positioned within the affective tensions between their own self-images and cultural ideas of the “exotic other” at the intersection of Blackness and being female (Brooks, 2006; Durham, 2012; Simmonds, 1999; Wesley, 2006), they openly vocalized their struggle to just be in school. In this case, just as all students of color were subjected to a curriculum of racial profiling in the halls, a curriculum about bodies and being was enacted daily between the girls of color, staff, administration, and their Anglo peers.

Sound File: Pajama Pants

Independent of the fit of the clothes or the context (e.g., class versus Saturday detention), the bodies of girls of color were often noticed and reprimanded for existing
while Black and female—regardless of the clothes they wore, they seemed to have been penalized for their Black, female bodies. It is important to note that while girls faced dress code violations much more frequently than boys of color, boys were not impervious to such visibilities. Though comparatively infrequent to the times girls were confronted, boys complained about teachers’ objections to sagging pants. While sagging pants on boys of color and leggings on girls of color were objects of discontent among staff members, a few Anglo boys wore t-shirts with racialized messages or confederate flags. These shirts, as shown in Figure 6, often displayed offensive messages regarding Confederate positions. However, on more than one occasion I asked boys wearing these shirts if they had been sent home for their attire and I was told they had not. Perhaps more significantly, as I passed a staff hall monitor, he was complimenting one of these students on his choice of attire.

To be clear, during the course of the study, I observed only four students who wore clothes with such messages. In addition, it is possible that these individuals were disciplined at later dates. While punishments that girls and boys of color faced can easily be chalked up to infractions that potentially show parts of the body in comparison to a loose fitting t-shirt, it is the hidden curriculum of acceptable ways of being to which I am attending. While arguments have been made that wearing the confederate flag is as much about identity as it is about freedom of speech (Carlson, Schramm-Pate & Lussier, 2005; Chiang, 2007; Kaplan, 2007), particularly in the case of the girls, the message of legitimate racism against illegitimate Blackness became clear. In this context, the question became, whose bodies and messages about being had cultural value?
Figure 6. T-shirt logos featured on clothes that Anglo children wore during the year.
Girls of color articulated their frustration of being othered through what they perceived to be the unequal enactment of school policy. They were confounded by their understanding that there seemed “no right way to be in [their] clothes while others [could] be how they want,” as Tiana explained. This is not dissimilar to the boys who vocalized being in trouble for “breathing the wrong way” while at school. However, while boys gained access to physical places and social spaces by giving in to stereotypes of Blackness and masculinity, girls found places to “just be” by playing into sociocultural norms of gender. Although the constraints of meeting an ideal of White femininity often frustrated the girls, it also enabled the group to be far less visible than the boys of color. In other words by playing into sociocultural expectations, girls were able to become less noticed, although never invisible, and participate in the underlife of the institution more easily.

**Spaces of Possibility: Little Africa, the Underlife and Gay-ness**

While boys resisted marginalization in much more active ways (e.g., violent threats, (re)claiming physical places daily or wandering the building), the passive resistance exercised by the girls granted them similar access to the underlife of the institution (Goffman, 1961). As Goffman argued, local actors gain access to the underlife of an institution by first playing a role within respective sociocultural norms and values then working within and around such understandings in order to access places and spaces that provide relief from the constraints of those ideas and ideals. Just as Mills (1998) discussed social ontologies that are pre-determined ways of being via sociocultural ideas and ideals, Goffman (1961) argued that local actors must attend to these pre-conceived
notions of being in order to easily participate in the underlife of an institution. For example, if a girl is expected to be quiet, her silence becomes a part of the “way girls are supposed to be” in a culture. Her participation within the underlife and actions that may be in friction with these ways of being become un/noticed as she has already paid the piper of social ontology. Here, both boys and girls of color participated in various roles in order to have the space to participate in the underlife. For example, as boys were admonished for their behavior and sent to the office during class, they often took most of the class period to wander or meet up with friends before arriving at their designated destination. Similarly, girls of color who complied with gender stereotypes and, as Tara noted above, worked to be “on their best behavior,” frequently asked for passes to leave class and then met up with friends in the restroom or another safe space.

As presented in the literature review, Mills (1998) argued that one’s social ontology is a way of being that is a sociocultural construction, a glass ceiling of how one can be in the world. This is not dissimilar to Goffman’s (1961) discussion on the underlife and the roles that local actors play that are concentric to the institution’s sociocultural expectations of being. In terms of resistance and resilience to boundaries and borders (Helfenbein, 2010), both boys and girls of color used their social ontology in order to open up “spaces of possibility” (Helfenbein, 2010, p. 103) of the underlife of the school. By this I mean that students of color were utilizing an acute understanding of their social ontology to gain access to particular places and social spaces. Although Mills discussed social ontology in static terms, here they are understood as fluid and possibly manipulated by student agency.
While students of color enacted their agency to “be” in school, they similarly used their available wiggle room to open up spaces for other marginalized populations. Specifically, a group of lesbian students spent time in Little Africa, interacting with both gender groups every day. As heard in the following clip from an interview with a lesbian participant and two students of color, there is strong consensus on how each group benefits from the lesbian population spending time in Little Africa after school.

Sound File: An Army

However, it is important to note that the ubiquitous answer among students of color when interviewed without lesbian students present was that, comparing the two populations (students of color or lesbians), they were acutely aware that it was more “difficult to be gay than to be Black” in the school. When pressed as to why gay males were not welcomed in Little Africa, both boys and girls of color articulated ideas of gay men being insulting to the masculinity of men of color. As most males of color defined their masculinity on a binary of femininity, these students found gay males, particularly those who identified with feminine expressions, as a push on their ideals of being a man (Kimmel, 2004).

Although Little Africa functioned as a safe space for straight boys, the same comforts were not extended to gay males, particularly any boys of color who identified as gay. Additionally, any behavior that could have been considered “gay” was quickly rectified by the group. One example of this behavior occurred when Jahmir had received a close up of a penis from a friend. Rather than deleting it, he brought the image to the
group in Little Africa. A sudden uproar of comments like, “Are you fucking fag? Why the fuck did you save that?” erupted from the group.

Deryl, a boy who was often viewed as a group leader that often used his tall, muscular frame to tower over his peers, was called over. He took one look at the photo, wrapped his arm around Jahmir’s narrow shoulders, and whispered loudly,

Boy . . . you better get that shit off your phone if it comes in. You want people thinkin’ you a fag? No . . . you don’t. Now I’m not gonna beat you to help you remember, this time. Hear me? You ain’t no fag so don’t have fag pics on your phone.

Jahmir quickly worked to delete the image and Deryl lifted the weight of his large arm off Jahmir’s shoulders. The explicit message that being gay would not be tolerated near the group was understood among boys, Anglo and Black, within the school who regularly avoided the borders of Little Africa. Additionally, this situation highlights the ways that boys of color not only came to terms with their own sexual orientation, as all students do during adolescence, but were simultaneously pushed into particular understandings of sexuality at the intersection of cultural ideals and in-group messages. In terms of why lesbians were welcomed to the spaces and places of Little Africa, as Keilonte expressed, “Lesbians are just hot. Well, they’re hot and no one else around here will have them. Gay boys? Hell no! I don’t want them hitting on us.”

The inclusion of lesbian students to the exclusion of gay males is significant among the underlife of marginalized populations at the school for at least the following reasons. First, following Freire’s (1970) discussion on oppression, students of color have
been culturally presented with a monolithic understanding of ways of being and knowing that guides them toward the position of be-coming the oppressor. Students of color in this case are using their available power to further oppress one population (gay males) while permitting another to have space that the group may otherwise not be given in the school. In this context, students of color in some ways become the oppressor of the gay male population. The normalized history of questions of sexual orientation playing into ideas and ideals of masculinity, along with what appeared to be cultural amnesia about the historical implications of men on the down low (Boykin, 2005; Sandfort & Dodge, 2008), engendered a habitus of distain among males of color at Bridgeport for gay males, regardless of race or class.

Second, following Bourdieu’s (1993) discussion on fields, the boundaries between the fields of sexual orientation are porous in this space. As questions of identity and power are played out daily within these fields, questions of sexual orientation often came into focus as students of color grappled with their own orientation and had everyday experiences with LGBTQ students. As students of color interact with the LGBTQ population, one marginalized group uses their available cultural capital to create social norms and values for the space. In this case the imposed values created a fragmentation of the larger LGBTQ group, positioning lesbians with the additional capital of physical and emotional protection from their straight Anglo peers. Just as there is a division in the subaltern between male athletes of color and non-athletic males of color, regardless of race gay males are further positioned as “subpersons” (Mills, 1998) of the school’s underlife.
H. McDermott and Varenne (1995) argued that culture is “not so much a product of sharing, as a product of people hammering each other into shape with the well-structured tools already available” (p. 326). The practice of pounding one’s way of being into structured, socioculturally defined molds is similar to Mills’ (1998) discussion on social ontology. Mills used social ontology as a way to explicate a way of being that is socially constructed through exclusivist contracts that shape ideas and ideals about individuals and groups. The “contracts” Mills described are imposed upon socially designated “subpersons,” a term that parallels Spivak’s (1988) description of the “subaltern,” to talk about traditionally marginalized people. These contracts are internalized to the point where they become habitus (Bourdieu, 1993) and are questioned and unquestionable. Divisions within the groups of these “subpersons” are common within any underlife of an institution. In other words, just because a group is marginalized does not remove the concept of in-group difference. In the context of marginalized students at Bridgeport, layers of power within the subaltern existed as a status quo of marginalized students.

**Conclusion**

*The final bell has rung and the halls that once swelled with the near chaos of hundreds of students have dwindled down to a few dozen in scattered groups. Ten to 15 students of color remain in Little Africa with the rise and fall of their chatter being echoed in the nearly empty halls. Laughter punctuates the exchanges that are starting to wind down. Frequently a boy, like Deryl who is regarded as a group leader, without saying a word, will begin moving toward the doors. The rest of the group follows his cue*
and the group moves out together. Matt pulled out his cell phone and began to play A$AP Rocky’s *F**kin’ Problems* as loudly as possible. The once separate groups of boys and girls meld into one mass. Boys often shove each other as they continue to walk but the push generally causes a collision against one of the girls who promptly yells something and shoves him back. Toward the edge of the school property they often split into two groups and walk home to either Smithville or Hawks Corner, the high-pitched tinny beat of Matt’s music still echoing back toward the school as they walk away.

**Connections of Space, Place, and Being**

As is evident in the above vignette and throughout this chapter, schooling has a longstanding history of contributing to an adolescent Black awareness (Cooper, 1892; hooks, 1994; Metz, 1978; Woodson, 1933). These embodied understandings of self as Other have been thoroughly explored through their theoretical and material groundings and consequences within sociocultural norms and values (Cooper, 1892; Metz, 1978; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007; Winn, 2011; Woodson, 1933). As normalized ideas of racism permeate school structures, the hidden curriculum (Apple, 1971; Giroux & Penna, 1983; Jackson, 1968) engenders schooling’s systemic ideals of Other. In other words, as the hidden curriculum thrives, the business of marginalizing particular student populations continues to flourish.

Shifting the focus away from the ways in which the hidden curriculum is reified through the classroom (Giroux & Penna, 1983), what was presented here is what I, following Mary Metz’s (1978) lead, have come to think of as the experiences and curriculum of the corridor. This focus is significant for at least the following reasons.
First, it attends to the daily practices of school staff and administration in this context that implicitly and explicitly contributed to the racialized sociocultural norms and values propagated through the hidden curriculum. Whether it is through excessive stops in the hall, aggressive encounters with students, unequal enforcement of school policies, or an undercurrent of racialized ideas that were openly vocalized by youth and adults, the curriculum of the corridor was a social ontology (Mills, 1998) of Other. Boys of color were taught that their ways of being could not exceed those of a stereotyped urban Black male, a danger to be controlled in the school. Although their being in Little Africa enabled them to interact without the performance of self that included fighting, it was also a form of legitimate surveillance for administrators and staff members. Similarly, girls of color learned not only their actions but also their bodies were to be regulated by Anglo ideas and ideals.

While research in schools often focuses on social and academic epistemologies that contribute to broader social framings of Whiteness as property (Apple, 1971; Jackson, 1968; Winfield, 2007), these data reflect the ongoing contribution of a school’s normalized racism within hidden curriculum that is enacted between students, staff, and administration daily. This is important because, as the hidden curriculum is nested within sociocultural norms and values within the school, it is also affective, taking place between bodies, an enactment of the everyday. Much like Bourdieu’s (1993) discussion of fields, normalized sociocultural ideals are as implicitly a part of the background as they are explicitly enacted between local actors; as much a part of school policies as they are the procedures that are carried out.
Second, focusing on the experiences of the corridor highlights the ways that students of color in this context have utilized their agency in order to open up spaces and places in the school where the underlife of the institution (Goffman, 1961) provides a safe space for marginalized student populations. As discussed in the literature review, power and agency are imbricated as culture is enacted through and between local actors. Students in this case have utilized their agency in the construction of the underlife, including the power structures that are at play and the stratification of individual or group power within the subaltern (e.g., athletes to non-athletes, gay to straight, etc.).

The subsequent chapter details that safe spaces for students in academic classrooms are scarce, making the spaces created in the corridor more significant to these populations. However, it should be noted that using their available wiggle room students of color have used this safe place to provide a protected space for lesbian students while further oppressing gay male students. Just as Freire (1970) wrote about the oppressed becoming the oppressor, regardless of gender, students of color used their available power to control a significant aspect of inclusion and exclusion within the underlife of the school.

Finally, despite several in-group differences, students of color in this context have negotiated a place where they can just be against an oppressive formal and hidden curriculum of the corridor. This is no small accomplishment given the structure of the school. While all students of color were positioned to perform particular socioculturally designated roles, Little Africa functioned as a space within the underlife of the institution where they could relax into the group and be themselves for a moment. Further, using
their own agency, they successfully carved out places where their own formal curriculum could be enacted against the boundaries and borders of other raced forms of curricula that existed in the school.

Little Africa is a place. The significance of its boundaries and borders has at least dual significance. On one hand, they are between group borders that are socioculturally created to keep the status quo, an understanding of Other created for and about students of color. Anglo students avoid this border while staff and administration reify it through their own policies and procedures. On the other hand, boundaries are created by students of color that allow them to exercise agency and cultural capital within Little Africa in ways it is not easily enacted in other parts of the school. As Massey (2005) reminded us, “without multiplicity, no space” (p. 9). It is these distinct trajectories that pushed for and against the agency of students of color that unfolded in the multiple ways of being and knowing of the corridors and in particular in Little Africa.
CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS 2: BENT OVER A BARREL: BEING BLACK, DEFICIT MODELS, AND BEING IN A SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL

We should emphasize not Negro history, but the Negro in history. What we need is not a history of selected races not nations, but the history of the world, void of national bias, race, hate, and religious prejudice. There should be no indulgence in the undue eulogy of the Negro. (Woodson, 1926, p. 94)

When they learn of Shakespeare and Goethe, we must teach them of Pushkin and Dumas. When they read of Columbus, we must introduce the Africans who touched the shores of America before Europeans emerged from savagery . . . Whatever man has done, we have done and often, better. (Buthane, 1938, p. 12)

The paradox of education is precisely this- that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. (Baldwin, 1963, p. 1)

The practical implications in schooling of Herbert Spencer’s (1859) essay “What knowledge is of most worth?” still resonates strongly with scholars who question the content and method of knowledge dissemination in contemporary schools (e.g., Page, 1991; Quinn & Meiners, 2009; Valente, 2011; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007). The dominant ideologies that are maintained through schools simultaneously continue social inequities for marginalized populations continue as the status quo (Anyon, 2000; Apple, 1993, 2006). So what counts as “knowledge”? Whose knowledge and histories are validated by schooling? How might schooling change if the script was flipped to be resonant rather than relevant (Gershon, 2012; Gershon & Ben-Horin, 2014) toward children and their communities?

The dialogue on forms of curricula, particularly on how they negatively affect marginalized student populations, has been well established in the curriculum studies
field (e.g., Cooper, 1892; Kliebard, 1987/2004; Malewski, 2009; Pinar et al., 1995; Woodson, 1933). Following Nespor’s (1997) argument, rather than untangling the significant threads of schooling, this chapter aims to look at curricula, the school and local actors as a part of a “knot in a web of practices that stretch into complex systems . . . fluid in form and content; as intersections of multiple networks” (p. xiii).

This perspective is significant for at least the following reasons. First, as it has been noted in the curriculum studies field, all forms of curricula have sociocultural consequences (Apple, 1971, 1999; Jackson, 1968; Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007). As Delpit (2005) eloquently argued, both historical and contemporary “educational movements seem lacking in the diverse harmonies, the variegated rhythms, and the shades of tone expected in a truly heterogeneous chorus” (p. 11). Here Delpit was arguing for a multiplicity of voice and perspective rather than a mono-vocal discourse. If, as scholars have argued, the curricula have sociocultural consequences, then such a monolithic structure is not only marginalizing to students who do not “fit” the norm but it positions children within the norm to un-intentionally continue such values as their ways of knowing are affected by the status quo.

Second, the curriculum is affective. As argued in the literature review, affect is the theoretically and materially consequential embodied relationship that exists between “ecologies, feelings, ideas, ideals, processes, experiences and events” (Gershon, 2013c, p. 2). Therefore, affect is significant because everything is affected, to some degree, by other things in a context. If affect is theoretically and materially grounded, it is related to
the curriculum not only in its resonance with knowledges (Gershon, 2013b) and bodies but also in the way that those knowledges impact and are found in bodies.

By this I mean that what is learned through all curricular forms—formal, enacted, hidden and null—have material consequences that land not only on individual students but on groups in ways that provoke and maintain normalized ideas and ideals (Cooper, 1892; DuBois, 1903, 1926, Woodson, 1933). What one learns is therefore inexorably connected to the way one is and comes to know about the world. This transaction, as Dewey and Bentley (1949) argued, is reciprocal and therefore, as read through the texts of scholars like Cooper (1892), DuBois (1903), and Woodson (1933), significant to one’s ontological, epistemological, and social self. Greene (1988), for example, emphasized the significance of such affective ties between curriculum and freedom from or freedom to society and individuals. Finally, just as Schwab (1969) wrote about the curriculum in action, what I am attending to here is the affective action between what is learned and how such lessons are rooted in people and the sociocultural.

Affect is therefore central to all forms of curriculum—formal, hidden, null, and enacted. While Western schooling tends to put an emphasis on epistemology (Kincheloe, 2006; Lambe, 2003), this does not mean that affect is not a significant aspect of curriculum theory. This is because if there is no affect between text and reader, between the delivery of the lesson and the student, there can be no effect of the intended and unintended knowledges disseminated in schools. For example, numerous scholars have argued against theoretical splits between mind and body, learning and person (Cooper, 1892; Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Gershon, 2013c; Greene, 1988; M. McDermott, 2011;
Woodson, 1933). In sum, if affect is not always imbricated within a curriculum, all curricula, regardless of kind or context, there would be no material consequences for any educational interactions. Much like affect is constantly in motion in, between, and around bodies (Gershon, 2013c; Stewart, 2007; Tsing, 2005), there is not only a relationship between forms of curriculum but also between curricula and local actors. For example, if a student of color learns about his historical roots only through slavery, the lesson affects him. Such lessons also affect broader hidden curricula as students develop understandings of an entire group’s historical underpinnings through a singular framework. As sociocultural ideas and ideals develop from the hidden curriculum, the enacted curricula in and between students and staff becomes one of racialized understandings. In short, all forms of curriculum push at bodies that, in turn, push back at the curriculum. The consequences of the curriculum are therefore not only theoretical but also material in ways that are constraining and enabling, depending on one’s positionality.

Understood as affective, or as being “in action” (Schwab, 1969), the curricula becomes and embodied practice (Mitchell, 2011). By embodied practice, I mean “any bodily act that conveys meaning . . . that [are] embodied and performed acts that generate, record and transmit knowledge” (Mitchell, 2011, p. 5). Returning to the previous discussion on curriculum as affect, actions are affects in motion, landing “on and between bodies and worlds” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). In these ways, actions affect and are affected by bodies and therefore, as Mitchell (2011) argued, are responsible for generating, recording, and transmitting knowledge. Remembering that both thoughts
and feelings are inseparable parts of the embodied experience of being a person, they too are affected by such embodied practices. While this argument aligns well with other scholars who have discussed embodied practices and knowledges (e.g., Ahmed, 2010; Behar, 1996; Rosaldo, 1993; Stewart, 2007; Stoller, 1997), Mitchell’s work attends to embodied practice that is culturally pedagogical through acts of violence, such as lynching. As Woodson (1933) described, education is often institutionally violent toward students of color through embodied practices that propagate social conditions of racism, including the acts of teaching, learning and being with/in curricular forms (e.g., Jackson, 1968; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Watkins, 2001). As discussed in the literature review, because culture is a web of significance (Geertz, 1973), spun by local actors that also creates the contexts for this understandings, the embodied practices of curricula that carry out this knowledge become an important part of our collective memory (Winfield, 2007).

In sum, collective memory is, in part, due to the embodied curricular practices that have preserved and engendered raced and racist ways of knowing and being. It is the embodied practice of spinning cultural webs of significance and memory with/in schools that iterates such cultural memories in school. What is explored here are the ways in which the forms of curricula—formal, hidden, enacted and null—functioned in the context of the school and the consequences the curricula had on students of color whose rhythms were affected by the heterogeneous chorus.

Returning to the example of teaching slavery, and as it is often accompanied in U.S. history classrooms, civil rights, an example of these layers becomes apparent. The
formal curriculum, or the prescribed knowledge students are intended to gain in school (Pinar et al., 1995), that students learn in this case are historical understandings about racial oppression. However, as it was certainly the context in the site of this study, the sum of African American life in the United States was narrowed to slavery and the Civil Rights movement. While slavery was often the history of the nameless, the Civil Rights movement often focused solely on activists like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr.

The null curriculum, or the content that is implicitly and explicitly not taught to students (Eisner, 1985; Flinders et al., 1986) in this case is found in names notably absent from lessons like Daisy Bates, Frederick D. Reese, Marcus Garvey, Sally Hemmings, William Harvey Carney, Ruby Bridges, Julian Bond, or Malcolm X.

Teaching about slavery and Civil Rights as only two points of understanding African American sociocultural contributions creates a hidden curriculum of racial value. The hidden curriculum is defined here as the implicit and explicit messages that are normalized in and through schools (Giroux & Penna, 1983; Jackson, 1968). In sum, a racialized formal curriculum “will only exacerbate the operation and effects of the ‘hidden curriculum’” (Page, 2006, p. 52).

If, as Schwab (1969) described, curriculum CAN BE in action, the enacted curriculum that exists between all local actors is what puts these other forms into a motion between teachers and students, classrooms, and corridors. From this perspective, enacted curriculum can be understood as affective and embodied, impacting one’s senses, feelings, and ideas in ways that strongly inform what and how one knows. Affect, then,
becomes a strong means for examining and analyzing what is often referred to as enacted curriculum.

**Framed, Again: Being Black Against the Social and the Academic**

The collective memory of Bridgeport Senior High School is, like many institutions, constructed in part by the current context and by the systemic iterations of broader sociocultural norms and values (Winfield, 2007). Scholars have a longstanding history of exploring the multiple, nested ways that the marginalization of particular student populations are reified through schooling (Cooper, 1892; Jackson, 1968; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007; Woodson, 1933). In particular, the focus of this literature has shifted from explicit marginalization, such as segregated schools and texts (see Cooper, 1892; Dubois, 1903; Woodson, 1933), to implicit systemic marginalization, through aspects like the hidden and null curricula (see Jackson, 1968; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Winfield, 2007). Within the classroom, for example, these systemic factors often inform what teachers teach and how lessons are delivered. This structure enables and normalizes a collective memory where students of color are framed as a problem (Dubois, 1903).

As this broader collective memory in schools intersects with Bridgeport Senior High School, students of color are implicitly and explicitly positioned as “trouble.” These collective memories, as Winfield (2007) argues, do not happen accidentally. They are socioculturally maintained at Bridgeport through the school and the broader community. For example, at staff meetings over the past several years, the school’s statistics on standardized tests and college readiness have been organized through a
detailed breakdown that is often consistently based on race, gender and (dis)ability. While such demographic information can also be used for social justice work to demonstrate how groups are marginalized, these were used to the opposite effect, showing how marginalized populations negatively impact the school’s test scores.

A salient example of the construction of such cultural understandings occurred when I was absent from a staff meeting the year I conducted this study. Mrs. Smith, a tall, Anglo, veteran teacher whose son is bi-racial, felt irate after the meeting, informing me that the principal stood “in front of everyone and basically explained how shitty the Black kids are.” Her concern was that the slides and their presentation depicted students of color negatively without a balanced explanation as to why their scores were low. The solution, as she explained, was for teachers to find ways to better reach these populations, without any specific tools or suggestions. I was familiar with this framing of students of color as in past meetings I had been handed forms with similar statistics listed and the numbers of minority populations literally highlighted as a concern to be addressed. Other teachers often complained about these meetings, explaining that they were not equipped to address these “special needs” and that students of color didn’t seem to care, so why should they? The idea that students of color were framed as a statistical and cultural problem within the school is discussed throughout this chapter. By this I mean that their differences were viewed as deficits (Delpit, 2005; Oakes, 1985; Page, 1991; Varenne & McDermott, 1998) and, as shown in the data, such deficits were often perceived as a problem that should not burden the staff.
Despite any possible intention for these meetings to help raise awareness, the explicit message passed to staff was that students were a problem not only to their classrooms but also to the standardized test scores. At the time of the study, standardized test scores were beginning to contribute to state and national conversations on implementing merit pay where teacher’s salaries would eventually be tied to students’ test performance. Teachers therefore took these messages with a degree of alarm because, as one teacher explained, “What am I supposed to do when *those kids* affect how much money is in my bank?” Further, in the case of the information Mrs. Smith shared in Figure 7, this information reproduced raced and gendered expectations for students. As explored in the previous chapter, this is particularly damaging for the girls of color who often expressed further marginalization through gender.

As a result of these systemic and contextualized messages, students of color were often positioned for anticipated failure at Bridgeport. When they succeeded, they became the exception to the rule. When they failed, either through their actions or their academics, they were the rule. In sum, not meeting the school’s ideals of success often became a self-fulfilling prophecy for students of color (Olmedo, 1997; Rist, 1970; Weinstein, Gregory, & Strambler, 2004). The idea that a deficit model often prompts the fulfillment of such prophecies is certainly not new (e.g., Delpit, 2005; Rist, 1970; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). While the last chapter delved into the ways that students of color were framed as a social problem within the corridors, this chapter explores the double(d) framing of students of color as an academic problem that implicitly and explicitly existed within the classrooms at Bridgeport. An emphasis is placed on the
ways in which the nested forms of curricula affect young people of color that reinscribe
dominant White stream values of the school, recasting these children to the margins.
This chapter begins by talking about students’ experiences in classrooms and then
continues by explaining closed spaces where students of color are arrested by
sociocultural norms in ways that restricts the wiggle room sought by the underlife of the
institution. It concludes by discussing open spaces where students of color have some
degree of agency within the spaces of education.

Figure 7. Slides presented at a staff meeting to increase staff awareness of low-scoring
groups.
Classrooms, Curricula, and Consequences

It is the week before homecoming and students are participating in spirit week where they wear clothes that correspond with themes designated by the student council. Yesterday, for example was Coke versus Pepsi day and students wore either red or blue clothes to demonstrate their allegiances to either brand. Today is “-er” day where students dress in clothes that resemble anything ending in “-er” (e.g., painter, dancer, teacher). Deryl walked past a group of teachers, including myself. A colleague asked him, “What are you supposed to be?” He smiles widely and replied, “I’m two things . . . A rapper preacher” and points to his collar and chains. As he walked away a colleague leaned into the group and said, “I thought he was another name that ended with –er . . . Ni . . . ” and stops to laugh. A second colleague shook her head and said, “You’ve got to find a new joke. You said that one last year for a different spirit day.” The group chuckled and resumed their conversation while Deryl turned to go to the restroom at the end of the corridor.

A few days later, Jahmir is walking into his language arts class. An Anglo classmate blocks the door with his body and shouts loudly, “Get to the back of the bus! No one wants you learning in here!” At first Jahmir tries to push his way through but the boy’s arms are braced in the doorway. Eventually he waits patiently until the bell rings and the boy runs to his seat. The teacher, not hearing or perhaps not acknowledging the incident, clears his throat and says, “Ok . . . ok . . . Let’s just get seated.” Jahmir dashes quickly to his seat without saying a word.
The same day Andrew entered a classroom early to find a picture on the board drawn by one of his classmates (Figure 8; Day 1). His name is written underneath with an arrow pointing to the image. He shouts, “What the fuck?” and moves to erase the image. The loud exclamation along with recognition of the voice caught my attention as I was walking by, causing me to peek my head in the classroom. Seeing the image I took a photo of it to show to the teacher and erased it quickly to prevent other children from viewing it as they entered the room⁹. Andrew sat in silent anger at his seat while he and I waited for the teacher to return to her room. He would later reveal that this became a pattern and, as he felt comfortable, brought in pictures of drawings as they occurred (Figure 8; Day 2). Not too much longer, Amani, hearing of these injustices, took a photo of a classmate’s agenda planner that he had decorated with a confederate flag that spelled out the word “rebel” against a camouflage background (Figure 9). “See!” he said indignantly, “These assholes get away with everything! This kid sits in the front row with this out all the time. How does the teacher not see that? How does she not care?”

Sound File: Do you do drugs?

⁹Although in this case I elected to report the incident to the teacher, one of the most difficult ethical boundaries I wrestled with during this study was that of reporting such injustices while working to protect participants to whom I had a moral and legal obligation to protect their privacy as informants. As a result, I used member checking during and after the study to determine what students were comfortable with my reporting to administration or other staff members. As I either observed these experiences or had them brought to my attention, I was positioned to continually make these judgment calls in the best interest of the children. I find that, even while analyzing the data, I still struggle with these dilemmas as they affected with my dual position as a teacher-researcher.
Figure 8. Images drawn on the board by an Anglo student to represent Andrew.

Figure 9. Agenda book of an Anglo student decorated in camouflage and the word “REBEL.”
**Historical Amnesia: Shackled by Memories**

As students worked to get to class, they were affected by the attitudes of their teachers and the explicit discrimination of their peers. While the sound file “getting stopped” from the previous chapter explicated how students could encounter multiple interruptions in one mapping session, these narratives underscore the difficulty students of color face when they are on their way to academic places or prior to academic instruction. Students of color, like all students, were positioned to perform a particular version of themselves through schooling (Goffman, 1959). However it should be noted, as argued in the last chapter, students of color held the perception that when they did not perform the expected roles, they often were in trouble more quickly, and with more severe punishment, than their Anglo peers.

The last chapter argues that racialized hidden and enacted curricula existed in the corridors through stopping students excessively, giving out additional punishments for the way girls dressed or passively allowing the “N” word to be used by Anglo students. The vignette above is an extension of that conversation that continues throughout this chapter. This normalization of a racialized hidden curriculum allowed teachers and students to openly make racist jokes (in both verbal and artistic expressions). Further, walking through the halls, it was not unusual for Anglo students to use the “N” word to describe each other, believing the term was neutral when describing an Anglo student. This appropriation of language could also be observed in the morning video announcements when on occasion Anglo students would use African American Vernacular in the opening screen under school events (see Figure 10). In this case,
despite the message below calls for a “student council meeting during 12th period” that is not gendered, as Sierra noted, “The most fucked up part is that it’s not “fo da bros,” it’s for everyone . . . boys AND girls. They’re talking Black without even knowing what they’re saying. Tell me that’s not messed up!” This irritated students of color as they were considered “too Black” if they spoke this way but Anglo students were able to use such language in their daily lives without falling under the same scrutiny. In other words, one could act Black without actually being Black but being Black and acting Black fell under racialized understandings of being and knowing.

Figure 10. An opening picture for the video announcements.

This historical amnesia (S. Hall, 1997) permitted these events to function in isolation, both from the current cultural context as well as from broader sociopolitical histories. For example, if one places mid to late 1800’s depictions of the minstrel Blackface actors or the menacing “Buck” next to the Anglo children’s drawings of African American males and biracial males of African descent (Figure 11), students’
action aligns with a history of racism that is central to processes that marginalized populations of color both in and outside of the classroom. Further, these images evoke no-longer-so-implicit cultural memories about African American males as the “fool” or the “aggressor.” As discussed in the previous chapter, while boys of color in the school often played into the aggressive roles they were afforded for the cultural capital it provided, Anglo students and staff were also responsible for perpetuating these
stereotypes. In sum, while students of color acted within socioculturally accepted performances of self (Goffman, 1959), this image was not only reinscribed but engendered by the broader community of students and staff through actions like, but not limited to, the vignette above.

These peer-instigated injustices of the corridor and the classroom pained the students. Adding further insult to injury from their teachers’ lack of correction to their peers’ actions and more than occasionally explicit othering behaviors, they felt no respite from discrimination during instructional time. Some students reported incidents like the only African American girl in the classroom being instructed to face the wall because the teacher had “enough of her” for the day, explaining that she was “too loud” for the class. However, students cited these incidents as isolated among staff. Rather, their primary concern came from the inherent lack of people of color within the formal curriculum. As Raquel explained, “These book ain’t got none of my people up in ‘em unless they’re in shackles or breakin’ ‘em.”

Sound File: Ancestor Slaves

The formal curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995), in this case the intended lesson about slavery, was nested within the hidden curriculum (Giroux & Penna, 1983; Jackson, 1968), where students’ ancestral histories were exoticized and students became the token representative for the experience of slavery. Both formal and hidden curricula are imbricated with the null curriculum (Eisner, 1985; Flinders et al., 1986), which has largely reduced the African American experience to one of subservience. As heard in the sound file, like a subsonic sound that can be felt but not necessarily heard
(O’Connell-Rodwell, Arnason & Hart, 2000; O’Connell-Rodwell, 2007), these curricula had affective consequences for children of color. As noted earlier in this chapter, the formal curriculum is always both academic and social as choices about what knowledge to teach and how to teach that knowledge are always informed by sociocultural norms and values. Similarly, it is always the case that multiple curricula operate simultaneously. It is therefore the case that lessons participants in this study experienced in their classrooms strongly contribute to a social ontology (Mills, 1998) of person of color in, as Raquel noted, “shackles or breaking them.” Similarly, it should be noted that the presence of these curricula affected their Anglo peers as they created the foundation from which children built broader sociocultural norms and values.

Sound File: Downfall of the World

**Being, Knowing, and Arrested by Norms**

Helfenbein (2010) argued that spaces are imbued with possibility, with opportunities for resistance and resilience among local actors. The actions of resistance that local actors chose can take on multiple forms and often inaction speaks as loudly as action (Tuck & Wayne, 2014). Although, as Foucault (1978) argued, there is no outside of power, students have agency to inter-act in ways that open up spaces of possibility. For example, in the last chapter, girls of color often interacted with staff and peers in ways that abided with Anglo femininity in order to gain access to the underlife of the institution and enact agency to “be” in school. This section discusses the spaces where students of color felt particularly arrested by the power structure at play. As described below, these are spaces and places throughout the school where mainstream norms and
values were in greater enforcement. It is important to keep in mind that at times, like in the cafeteria, it can be argued that increased enforcement of norms, and therefore rules, is in direct correlation to safety and security. However, here I am attending to the ways in which enforcement of sociocultural norms and values call differences into greater relief as deficits while simultaneously acquiring kids in increasingly tighter sociocultural double-binds. As students of color exercise their available agency against these pressures, friction (Tsing, 2005) between marginalized students and the mainstream pushes at the cultural status quo. Such friction can have both positive and negative consequences. In this case, both are explored through the spaces and places that necessitate such movement.

**Art is for White People: Getting Noticed for Work**

Sound File: [Using the “N” Word](#)

Sound File: [Art is a Joy](#)

In Bridgeport Senior High School several art teachers taught a variety of art classes from drawing to pottery. Due to budget cuts, there were few courses offered that students could take to fulfill their elective credit requirements which served to funnel most students at the school towards art classes at some point during their high school experience. Students’ reactions to attending art class varied widely between elation and exasperation. Those who enjoyed taking the class often commented on the course offering a chance to express themselves in ways that were outside of traditional academic coursework.
Every quarter, the art teachers changed the displays outside of their rooms to highlight the work they found to be exceptional. The year that this study was conducted, there were four pieces on which students commented (Figure 12). Each piece was produced by Anglo students and depicted African Americans. The representations of people of color in this art largely portrayed African Americans with distressed expressions. Although any child should be able to draw a person of any race—conversely, for example, students of color should be able to depict Anglo students—the issue here is that students of color complained that their art in general and self-representations in specific were consistently not hung in the school. This appropriation of a representation reified the position of Black voices within the hidden curriculum of the school. For example, although Ambika, the Indian student whose voice was heard in the sound file “Art is a Joy,” articulated how much she loved the class, she was consistently disappointed when her work was not chosen for the hall. The silenced voices and suffocated abilities of students of color in this case were similarly argued against by DuBois (1926) in *Criteria of Negro Art* when he stated:

Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of Black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.

(para 29)
Figure 12. Drawings and paintings displayed during the year outside the art classrooms.

Tatum and Tasers?: Eating While Black

Sound File: Sitting in the Way Back

Sound File: Cafeteria Trays

Cafeteria cash registers opening and slamming shut along with the high pitched beep of students rapidly putting lunch codes into data pads punctuates the hum of voices in the cafeteria. Across the five possible lunch periods, if there are more than three or four students of color, they tend to sit together in the back of the cafeteria, furthest from the registers but from a position that gives them the ability to watch events unfold from a slight distance. During the year data were collected, during the two periods when the
group of students of color was larger, totaling about seven students, the cafeteria aides positioned themselves behind the table where the students of color sat rather than at the other end of the cafeteria near the registers.

The majority of participants in the study made negative comments about the cafeteria. Each had a story to share about the ways in which they were marginalized by other students or staff. For example, one afternoon I was walking past the cafeteria when I noticed Eli chest to chest with an Anglo student. Silence had fallen over those students watching in anticipation for a fight to break out. I walked up to the two and asked what had happened. Eli seethed, “This fucker stole my chair, again! I’m sick of sharing a chair. I got here early. I got the chair. Fuck him! I’m sitting in my own chair today.” In the corner there was an extra seat that was not taken so I tapped them both on the shoulder to get their attention, walked over, got the chair, placed it by them, and said, “Ok! Problem solved! Enjoy!” Neither boy moved. I put my body partially between theirs, looked at Eli and said in a calm voice, “Come on, now . . . This is not worth a suspension. It’s a chair. A damn chair. And now you’ve got one. Relax.” His body relaxed slightly and he sat down. After talking with the other boys at the table I went to the four teachers, whose duty is to monitor the cafeteria during this time, who were standing on the side of the room looking dismayed. I asked them at what point they had planned to take any action or call for any backup. The one woman, a thin, Anglo woman in her early 20s replied, “I don’t know . . . I just don’t know. They just frightened me, you know?” I made my way quickly to the nearest administrative office and suggested that the following day an administrator or the school resource officer should stop by that
area and make sure there are no problems. By the end of the day students informed me that nearly every African American child at the table was issued some kind of punishment and they were told they could no longer sit together. Although it is student perception, several participants reported that the Anglo students involved were not given any formal punishment and were permitted to sit together in the future. As I visited the cafeteria in the upcoming weeks I did notice that the students of color were dispersed and the Anglo table seemed to have the same arrangement of students. Eli later came and thanked me for calming the fight down and explained that the Anglo child had used the “N” word, that he had told staff and nothing had been done to that point. As he explained, “I wanted a chair and, well, I was just done being bothered.”

However, the story that ignited a mutual sense of rage among students of color occurred in the fall semester. Damari was a transfer student whose over six foot, more than 200 pound body some students and staff shared they felt was intimidating. Although he carried himself with a particular kind of confidence that bordered on resentment from, as he explained, being stared at constantly, his size was the topic of conversation from the first week of school that he was a new transfer student. He quickly became known as disruptive and obstinate by staff members who frequently asked him to leave the classrooms for his behavior. For example, he once complained that he was told to get quiet in a class for loudly saying, “There it is!” when his math teacher solved a problem that he didn’t understand and came to realize how to solve the equation. In another incident, I ran into him as he was pacing the hall. He complained to me that he had been being kicked out of a class after arriving four minutes late and greeting the class with an
exuberant, “What’s up, people!” The teacher was upset that his class was disturbed and, in his words, told him to go back out and come back when he “knew how to enter a classroom correctly.” Mostly, he kept repeating how he was not sure how to act, how to be in a school where he was expected to be silent by teachers while other kids stared constantly at him “like a monkey in a damn zoo.”

One afternoon, some weeks/days later(?), Jahmir and Raquel sprinted into my room. Things had apparently come to a head and a fight had broken out in the cafeteria between Damari and an Anglo boy.

Sound File: Fight

Sound File: Police Perspective

**Jahmir:** Did you hear about Damari? Shit went down! This damn cracker . . . a little guy! He’s been an ass to Damari and today he posted up and Damari lost it and bitch slapped ‘em! Just like this! (Mimicking a punch in the air.)

**Raquel:** Yeah. He done lost it, Woz! Next thing I know the police is on him. I think they tazed him! That’s what everyone else is saying too. He was down there (on the ground) strugglin’! Principals all around. Kids screaming like they never seen a fight and a boy get ‘cuffed.

**Jahmir:** Yeah but the thing is, the other kid really started it. He’s been an ass for weeks, calling [Damari] names. So he had it coming, you know? Can’t fuck with an angry Black kid who doesn’t know what to do around here.
In the weeks that followed the incident, students posted cell phone images to the school’s Twitter account under the hashtag #WeRBridgeport, a hashtag created and encouraged by school officials earlier in the year to garner positive press about school events. Previous tweets under the hashtag ranged from images of athletes competing to moldy food under cafeteria tables.

In the case of this fight, images ranged from discriminatory messages to students’ reactions (Figure 13). By student reactions I mean some students, as Officer Volk stated, were shocked to watch violence in what they considered to be a suburban, peaceful school. Some were elated at the idea that a Black kid was so publicly arrested, as seen in Figure 14. Others were neutral about the incident but upset that it disrupted their day as rumors about tazing became the predominant conversation in classes that afternoon. In contrast, students of color began to protest Damari’s suspension by writing “free Damari” on their fingers and arms. As can be heard in the sound clip “fight,” students were promptly asked by staff to remove these messages.

While students of color seemed to understand that Damari’s decision to fight had serious consequences, they were upset that the boy who antagonized him did not face further punishment. Further, they were upset that while others could applaud the Anglo student’s actions on social media, their silent protests were prohibited. For example, several participants were upset that teachers asked them to remove the words “Free Damari” from their hands and arms. The end result was that several students and parents reported asking the school to remove the photos from the Twitter account. Their anger was only fueled when the posts remained unfiltered and, as of the end of the academic
year that this study was conducted, were still posted and accessible to the broader community.

*Figure 13.* Images from the schools’ twitter account of Damari’s arrest.
In the wake of the fight, both boys and girls of color expressed increased tensions and aggression from Anglo peers while at school. As but one example, I witnessed an immediate rise in the number of students who wanted to eat lunch in my classroom, fearing retaliation from Anglo peers who essentialized all students of color for Damari’s actions. Male students of color articulated the prejudicial treatment Damari received, feeling that any of their actions would have punitive consequences that were far more severe than those of their Anglo peers. In other words, students of color felt that if they engaged in a fight, especially after Damari’s altercation, they would receive additional detentions or suspensions from administration to, as Andrew shared, “make a point about their place in the school.” As a result, where before the incident with Damari students of color tended to either roam the hall or mill about in Little Africa, the group in general
tightened down for a few weeks, standing at the end of the day with their backs to the wall and avoiding the cafeteria altogether.

In Beverly Tatum’s (2003) seminal work, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race*, she discussed racially segregated groups in the cafeteria as safe spaces that act as a border that allows students of color some relief to be themselves, more free from normalized sociocultural racism that impacts students’ identities.

However, in this context, the cafeteria during lunch was not considered a safe space and is not regarded as “Little Africa” after breakfast. It is important to remember that while Damari’s actions intensified students’ of color apprehension about the cafeteria as well as negative perception of African Americans by Anglo students, students of color regularly avoided the cafeteria during lunch before this event. Those who did sit in the cafeteria regularly either explained that they had no other place to go or they felt they should be able to use the space despite consistent pressures. As Troy articulated in *Cafeteria Trays*, the opening sound file to this section, he endured a particular set of explicit pressures from staff members. However, as he explained, “I have a right to eat like any person, not like a Nigger in some corner.”

Another understanding participants shared over the course of the study is that they understood students of color who ate in the cafeteria regularly as exercising agency in pushing against oppressive norms and in many ways standing their ground, as a “right to eat at the damn lunch counter,” as Raquel explained. While Tatum (2003) asked about students sitting *together* in the cafeteria, here I have explored why all the students *avoid*
the cafeteria. In sum, what are the affective consequences for teenagers who are profiled for eating while Black?

**Pushing Back: Finding Spaces in Academic Places**

Audre Lorde (1984) wrote that “places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through that darkness” (p. 36). Similarly, McKittrick and Woods (2007) discussed the importance of “presenting communities that have struggled, resisted, and significantly contributed to the production of space” (p. 6). In other words, the exploration of not only how students were silenced in particular spaces and places but how they have enacted agency to be heard within them are equally significant. Where Lorde argued for spaces within poetry and a sense of self through ancient dialogues, McKittrick and Woods called for an attention to the stories that have impacted the creation and disruption of specific, normalized spaces.

This section attends to the ways in which students of color have used their agency and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993) to traverse the boundaries and borders of schooling and create space for their ways of being in academic places. It focuses on two places, my classroom and the gymnasium. This is because through interviews, maps, and observations, I quickly learned that there were few places students regarded in the school as “safe” during academic instruction. As it is explored here, these spaces of possibility were often perceived as fleeting by students of color in the context of the school or, as Kadence once expressed this, “the struggle bus to find a place to be and learn.” Lorde (1984) wrote:
Possibility is neither forever nor instant . . . We can sometimes work long and hard to establish one beachhead of real resistance to the deaths we are expected to live, only to have that beachhead assaulted or threatened by those canards we have been socialized to fear. (p. 38)

In this case, Lorde is speaking to the enactment of agency that is often quashed by the canards of sociocultural expectations and cultivation that instill fear and submission in local actors. This section also attends to students’ “struggle bus” to not only overcome sociocultural pressures to “be and learn” in places but also personal anxiety for resisting the spaces and places they have come to know as imbued with normalized racism and racialized expectations.

**Pushing Against Social Ontology: Hanging With Black Momma**

*After the morning bell rings I know it’s only a matter of minutes before the first children come to my room. Not my students who come to my class to learn Spanish, those who are required to attend. I’m talking about the students who come to my room to, as they put it, “avoid the shit” of places like study hall or lunch. The year of the study I had extra students in my room nearly every period. Nearly all of them were students of color and the number ranged from one to about three additional students per class. When students knew I had a planning period or lunch, I would often have as many as five or six ask for passes from lunch to come in the room. I had most of them reassigned as “classroom aides” so they officially became my responsibility. The only rule I explicitly set was that whatever students decided to do, it had to be productive in a way that either helped themselves or others. Many students used the time as a study hall, working*
diligently on their own work or often tutoring each other quietly as they could.

Sometimes, if they were an upper level Spanish student, they would volunteer to tutor peers in the class who struggled with the course content.

Sound File: Rapping

Sound File: Birthday

To be clear, students of color did not always stay on task. While they were respectful of students learning in class and quiet during moments I delivered the formal curriculum through lectures or notes, they, like any other teen, had the tendency to get off task during the moments other students were working in small groups. Similar to students’ behavior in Little Africa, the sound of these moments when students diverged from the formal curriculum was a rhythm of laughter, music, and jesting conversation. To be clear their off-task actions were regardless of race, but here I am attending to the sounds—laughter and conversation—which were similar to those that occurred in Little Africa when students were most relaxed and at home with community. In-group supervision meant that I rarely (about half a dozen times in a year) had to ask students to lower their voices.

Over time I became aware that several of the students had taken to privately calling me “Black Momma.” When I asked about this secretive nickname, participants would often chuckle nervously or say something like, “Well . . . you know. No one messes with Black Momma.” This image of a maternal figure was often reinforced as students would solicit my advice on relationships, jobs, or schoolwork. Although I appreciated that students sensed my presence as one that treated them with respect and
dignity, I was aware that my position as a woman of color who addressed questions of equity fell under the trope of a “momma” rather than any other conceivable position at the intersection of authority and being female. In one conversation with Sierra and Shay I asked them, “Why Black Momma? I am bi-racial, Anglo and Indian.” Sierra responded, “Well what else? You look after us and tell use when we’ve crossed the line. And you give us snacks from your cabinet. What else is a Black momma?” I asked about her other teachers who are female that look after them. Sierra scoffed, folded her arms, and said, “What makes you think they EVER look after us?” I asked about female roles outside of school. Shay commented, “Pleeeaaaase! Outside we’re either someone’s baby or a nigga . . . Not much ground to stand on between those two.”

On occasion, like a sibling tattling on a brother or sister, they would report issues within the group and ask me to mitigate the situation. For example, Marcus came to my room one day while Da’von waited in the hall. Marcus’ voice was nearly frantic as he explained that Da’von, a generally passive student whose version of violence was always verbal and never physical, was going to “pop off on the next asshole cracker who pushes him around” and that he could not take him to the office for help because he know that “Da’von would just get treated there.” I smiled at Marcus and asked him how old he was. Marcus proudly explained he was 17. I asked, “And in 17 years, you’ve never figured out how to calm down a friend? Don’t you consider yourself a leader in this group? Do you really need me or are you just nervous to try?” He paused a moment and replied, “Just nervous, I guess.” Over the next 20 minutes of their lunch and my planning
period, they talked through the issue and resolved it without my help. Afterward Marcus told me, “See . . . that’s why we come to you.”

The time students spent in my room was in many ways an extension of the safe space provided by Little Africa, though it did not have the same history and it was bound by educational expectations. By this I mean that students used their time in my room as a moment to relax and talk in similar ways to their time in the hallway. However because the place was appropriated by the school (and maintained by me) as an educational space, as are most classrooms in American public schools, the tenor of the space carried out by students was generally academic. While I will admit that “being with Black Momma” gave students a space and place for academic work, there is an inherent tension between how much work students would have completed independently of my room and how much was contextually dependent.

However, regardless of the context in my classroom, I consistently felt the tensions outside of the room. In other words, despite any feelings I had about a student’s ability to improve and worked to give him or her an opportunity to do so in my room, this did not mean the same opportunities of access existed in other places. One afternoon, for example, I found myself in an informal conversation with an administrator and a few teachers about Matthew. The teachers were complaining about Matthew’s behavior in class, adding that he rarely completed his work or cared enough to study for tests. The administrator, trying to “play devil’s advocate,” explained that
Matthew probably knows you have given up on him. You have to show him that you haven’t. Let him know that you care. Take him as your project. And if that doesn’t work . . . here are a stack of detention forms.

At the time, Matthew was working to make up several missed credits from previous years while catching up on missed work from a recent suspension. Although he worked diligently every day in my class during school hours, and occasionally after school, he often expressed feeling overwhelmed under a workload that felt insurmountable. The administrator’s actions paid lip service to questions of equity but, as she handed over the detentions, she engaged in broader the hidden curricula that sought to control rather than support Matthew’s potential.

Despite the context of “Black Momma’s” room being available or not, Matthew was positioned to overcome not only his choices which placed him in detentions and suspensions but also a broader underlying sociocultural precept of deficit that was enforced and propagated but administration and staff. As scholars have widely described, marginalized student populations’ differences are frequently viewed as deficits against the often valued Anglo, Christian, straight, English-speaking, male sociocultural norm. This deficit model positions students of color for failure within a sociopolitical system of schooling (Cummins, 2003; Milner, 2008; Valencia, 2010; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). In sum, when a student’s way of being cuts against several, if not all, of the valued cultural norms, the systems of schooling are often organized in ways where her being is perceived as a deficit. As a consequence, the constant and systematic essentialist purviews of such difference analyses not only contribute to the maintenance of the binary
of success and failure in schools (Varenne & McDermott, 1998) but also to the social
ontology (Mills, 1998) of broader sociocultural ideas and ideals.

Additionally, a formal curriculum with notable absences of people of color
compounded already explicit racialized sociocultural ideas and ideals about students of
color. Without a historical base for understanding one’s actions, these jokes continued
unabated throughout the year and, as a result, the historical significance of these actions
was notably absent from their collective memory. A salient example of such injustice
was articulated by Sierra who angrily explained that during study hall a teacher stopped
her from reading a fictional novel and asked, “What are you doing?” She replied,
“Reading.” The teacher said in a sarcastic tone, “Oh . . . I didn’t know you could do
that.” Sierra, who loved reading for pleasure, was so distraught that she stopped bringing
books to study hall and later asked to be transferred to my room as an aide so she could
read without fear of sarcastic comments. In a group interview with all girls of color she
relayed the story again and the other girls narrated similar stories. Finally Shyanne
asked, “Is it because we’re girls or Black? What makes us so stupid to them?” In a
subsequent interview with mixed genders, Troy said, “It’s not just the girls. We’re all
stupid niggers to them. Just for some reason they feel they have to tell the girls out loud,
like they need reminded and we should already know.”

In terms of academics functioning like cultural capital, girls of color frequently
expressed their frustrations with the disjuncture between academic expectations and
racialized understandings of their ways of knowing. One salient example of this double
bind was discussed last chapter in terms of athletes, though particularly males, who used
their cultural capital to move more freely within the building and the spaces near Little Africa. Students of color also noted that athletic capital pushed at teachers’ and administrations’ underlying understandings of people of color, opening up a space where they were considered “different from the thugs” under the image of the jock rather than the burnout (Eckert, 1989). However, athletic girls of color often noted that the emphasized expectation was on academics over athletics while boys of color noted, “just trying to pass the class to stay on the field.” In subsequent interviews with Anglo students in this study, this privileging of athletics above academics existed for young men while the inverse of either an expectation to be successful at both or a focus on academics existed for girls, regardless of race. However, all students of color were in agreement that academic success was more accessible for girls than boys but the explicit dialogue about the possibility of academic failure and inadequacy was more often frequently communicated to girls than boys.

Although it should be noted that, similar to the discussion on “Whiteness as property” in the previous chapter, girls also expressed that if they “acted more White,” they were given more chances at success and not felt that they were not as frequently overlooked by staff. By this I mean that as girls of color used less African American Vernacular in class, acted “on their best behavior,” and worked not to joke or laugh loudly with friends during class, they reported receiving more respect from their teachers and affirming attention. As Raquel once noted,

If you wanna get an A, all you gotta do is be White. If you can’t be White, all ya gotta do is act White. Don’t act like you at home, wid yo friends. If White kids
are joking in class, even if the teacher is not teachin’ and everyone is talkin’, keep yo damn mouth shut! Act proper. <straightens herself up and pulls her hair back into a bun> ‘Yes, ma’am.’ ‘Excuse me, sir.’ ‘Could you please explain?’ None of this ‘I don’t get it’, dumb nigga stuff.

As girls of color discussed the benefits of “acting White” in academics, it seemed that even the best “White act” fell short in moments that the girls’ differences were the overarching deficits by which they were measured.

For the students of color in this context, if they were acting or learning “appropriately” in my classroom, they became the exception to the rule within sociocultural expectations of their deficits within the building. If they were acting “too Black” or failing at academics, they reinforced the rule. As heard in the sound clips “echoed” and “expectations of Blackness” from the last chapter, students of color were acutely aware of how their ways of being were folded into staff and administrative perceptions of their differences. In my classroom, their actions became inconsequential against a system designed to make their failures a by-product that continually demonstrates the superiority of Whitestream students (Varenne & McDermott, 1998) and is therefore construct and maintain the status quo through the failure of marginalized students. This is not to say that their effort did not matter. Indeed, it is exceptionally important that students not only had an academic safe space but also worked in ways that they found meaningful. Instead, I am attending to the ways in which their efforts were overlooked or deemed irrelevant against broader sociocultural precepts. This is a modern condition of Woodson’s (1933) classic discussion that articulates the differences of
African American students being perceived as a “curse” (p. 3) as well as Cooper’s (1892) dialogue about the “fast bound clamps of ignorance or inaction” (p. 56) that bound women to the subservience of Anglo men. Simply, what does it mean when students of color in a contemporary school face the ontological ceilings that African American scholars argued against over 100 years ago?

**Pushing Back: Social/Physical Movement and Sounding Black**

Sound File: [Reindeer Games](#)

Sound File: [Parts of the Gym](#)

During their cartographic trips over the course of the academic year this study was conducted nearly all participants mapped the gym, often with greater detail compared to other areas drawn in visual representations or discussed in auditory maps (Figure 15). Students often drew other places with little detail, such as at most labeling on location, but when they drew the gym they would draw the basketball courts or label the locker rooms. During auditory maps students would often stop by the gym more than once or walk through the space noting the features as they passed (bleachers, court, etc.).

As can be heard on both sound files, during the first semester of this academic year that I studied the school, several students of color shared the same physical education class. Due to the fact that I taught during this class period, I was unable to watch the students’ interactions and instead had to rely on participant interviews and maps rather than my own observations. However students of color, regardless of race, gender, ability or sexual orientation, spoke positively about this physical education class.
because of the comparatively larger number of students of color in each class. More specifically, students shared that they enjoyed the fact that they were able to pick the music and, as Shyanne noted, students could “shake it like Beyoncé . . . between having dodge balls thrown at [them] and shooting hoops.”

However, besides commenting on positive aspects of physical education classes, students consistently mentioned negative interactions with other students. They explained that these moments often went unchecked by teachers because the sheer size of
the gym meant that discouraging exchanges were easily confined to the locker room or moments where the echoes of basketballs shielded their peers’ hostile words. However, all students were clear that when teachers heard these remarks, they were dealt with swiftly and in ways that made students of color feel they had received justice. From this perspective, students of color enjoyed the gym and felt they could often be more themselves there but that sense of relief was often tempered by their peers’ ability to be racist around rules and in spite of their teachers’ appropriate responses to such racist interactions. The gym was a safer space but not truly a safe space (Goffman, 1961) for students of color.

The most divergent part of the auditory maps collected was the ways in which students of color approached mapping the gym. By this I mean that students who were athletes mapped the gym by entering the space (“parts of the gym”) while students of color who were not athletes consistently talked about the gym from the hallway (“reindeer games”). This was the case regardless of gender but girls who did enter the gym did so in groups rather than on their own while boys of color were not shy about entering the gym alone.

These recursive patterns relate to the discussion in the previous chapter about cultural capital, athletics, and gender disparities. As previously discussed, boys of color who were athletes were able to move about more freely between the hallway and the gym at the end of the day, utilizing both places and spaces as they preferred. Girls of color, while given more cultural capital for their participation in athletics, were still
marginalized by gender not only within the school underlife but also within the broader sociocultural structures.

In the example of the maps, female athletes entered the gym but with the companionship of other female athletes. Male athletes of color came and left the gym as they pleased. Non-athletes of color, regardless of gender, talked about enjoying physical education class without entering the physical place. Anglo students who participated also commented on the gym but regardless of athletic status, all Anglo students mapped the gym by going inside, as can be heard in Bethany’s map.

Sound File: Non-strict Class

Although students of color were clear that gym provided a particular relief in their schedule, a moment to move as themselves, the performance of Blackness (Goffman, 1959) was not lost as in this movement they received pushback for their peers. Despite their freedom of place, which allowed them to have agency to choose music and, if athletic in ability, the capacity to move in and through spaces, students of color were still largely tied by sociocultural borders and boundaries. Students of color were, as Hudson (2007) argued,

Negotiating the heavily layered texts of race and racism that define the spaces of Blackness even before Black space [could] exist, especially in those contexts where Blackness is marginal . . . [particularly within] a certain critical value in understanding Blackness as always foreign to any place. (p. 172)
The inequities students of color faced in their everyday experiences funneled them toward the self-fulfilling prophecies of the “troubled student of color” whose differences became the deficits on which the successes of their Anglo peers that necessitates their failure was built (Varenne & McDermott, 1998). In the case of some spaces and places within the school, like the art rooms and the cafeteria, students’ alignment with the rules of failure became consequential in their achievement and abilities to “be” in public places. Similarly, in places that offered a brief respite from sociocultural discrimination, like my classroom or the gym, their capacity to demonstrate their abilities outside of such prophecies were inconsequential to broader social ontologies (Mills, 1998) that pre-determined their ways of being and knowing, their successes as failures.

The curricula—formal, hidden, null, and enacted—were discussed as woven pieces within the broader context of schooling within this chapter. For example, as part of their required readings for language arts, students read work like Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Themes presented through the formal curriculum around race in this and other as other “classic” works in the “canon” of American Literature often repositioned the history of people of color within slavery and oppression. The null curriculum often consisted of texts that emphasized more comprehensive themes that might resonate with of people of color, which only furthered a hidden curriculum of inferiority to the narratives and ways of being of students of color.
This curricula enacted the “choking away,” as DuBois (1903) wrote, of the ways of being and knowing of students of color at Bridgeport. By this I mean that while students certainly exercised agency in particular places discussed throughout this chapter (e.g., the gym or my classroom), their ontological and epistemological understandings were often suffocated in the broader context of the school. Further, in spaces and places where their presence was considered a nuisance (Woodson, 1933), the ways of being of students of color were at best devalued. At worst, in the case of the cafeteria, their being was considered a “problem” (DuBois, 1903) and as a result of bullying by their peers and pressure from the staff, they often removed themselves from the context or, in an enactment of agency, stayed in silent protest of sociocultural conditions.

Closing Vignette: Oppressive Moments of Silence

It’s spring. The afternoon is warm but there is a distinct cool breeze blowing slowly through the trees. I went outside to get some fresh air, to get away from the pressure of a colleague calling me a “spik” through a half joke and jeering smile. It was quiet outside as I sat on the bench. My lungs were half filled with fresh air when around the corner came Officer Volk with a young African American man handcuffed. A police SUV pulled up and the boy was placed in the back of the vehicle. Few words were quietly exchanged between the two officers as the boy sat in the back seat. What struck me about the moment was the absolute silence. Unlike Damari’s arrest earlier in the year, this was quiet with no one but me and the two officers to bear witness. I had no idea what the boy had done or who he was. He did not resist and just sat there, looking
like a stunned child who had just been batted upside the head by a cat. Still, it was silent. Even as the car pulled away.

Not long after there was another fight and an African American boy was arrested. It was after school and the administrators worked hard to keep the crowds at bay, their tension rising as children and adults peered from the car pick up lane to watch the event. As the boy’s mother came, she found herself in a verbal dispute with one administrator who, in frustration said, “Your son cannot act this way here! This is Bridgeport, not the ghetto!” The mother reeled back. Her face contorting with a similar sense of surprise as the boy a few days earlier. It was a face of hurt and disgust but she soon ended the argument and headed toward her car. For a moment the place was silent and much like the previous incident, the breeze flowed gently as the cars pulled away. Nothing was left but the impression of oppression on the silent faces of the children nearby.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: PRESENCES, ABSENCES AND BE-ING CHOKED OUT THROUGH SCHOOLING

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore how normalized structures and interactions impact marginalized high school students’ negotiation of physical places and sociocultural spaces in schools. As demonstrated in the literature review and throughout the subsequent chapters, the everyday structures of schooling that students of color traverse are affectively woven between students, staff, and administration. Schools, as with most culturally constructed, institutional spaces and places, are comprised of socio-historical and political significances (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Helfenbein, 2010; Massey, 2005). Within schools the curricula—formal, enacted, hidden, and null—are central to the knot of processes, norms, and values that are schooling (Nespor, 1997) as they drive inter-actions between local actors. As such, they provoke and maintain local cultural understandings and buttress broader sociocultural norms and values (Apple, 2006; Nespor, 1997; Page, 1991; Watkins, 2001). These curricula are enacted in all places and spaces in the school, from the classrooms to the corridors (Metz, 1978), in and between ideas and local actors. Finally, despite such carefully maintained layers and structures, individuals and groups agencies allow local actors the space and possibility to work, across and within these seemingly static sociocultural understandings and structures (Tuck & Wayne Yang, 2014). Therefore, one’s “is-ness” (Gershon, 2013b) and agency, her resistance and resilience (Helfenbein, 2010) to everyday experiences, matters.
Understanding how students of color negotiate predominantly Anglo spaces and places of schooling therefore necessitates an explication of the broader sociocultural norms and values that strongly inform everyday school interactions. However, such examinations fall short without an understanding of the relationship of these historically and politically situated ideas and ideals as they intersect with the everyday-ness of the student experience. To be clear, at Bridgeport Senior High School, sociocultural norms and values were particularly tightly coupled with Anglo norms and values. Specifically, this means that the normalized re-actions in the school were a reflection of the ways of being of a predominantly Anglo, heterosexual population. Further, it should be noted that the ontogenic, or ways of being that are always in a state of becoming, are also habitus (Bourdieu, 1993). By this I mean that ways of being are created through the social and are normalized in the everyday expressions of self. However, as Ortner (2006) and Goffman (1959) have argued, local actors always have agency in the way we enact presentations of self and our ways of being.

The remainder of this chapter describes how everyday interactions in schools are significant to understanding broader sociocultural norms and values as they are historically situated. Further, they describe how this examination is important to the field of curriculum studies. I begin by discussing the broader social context at Bridgeport that made it necessary for students of color to seek out the creation of safe spaces in school. This dialogue also explicates the performances of self that were both expected of and utilized by students of color in order to participate in the underlife of the institution. I continue with a discussion on the kinds of spaces students of color created by and for
students of color in the school and explaining how students used their agency as a tool for negotiating each of these spaces. This chapter ends by discussing how this study attends to some of the gaps in the literature given my analysis.

**Being and Beginning With History, the Curricula, and Corridors**

As discussed in the literature review, curriculum studies have a longstanding history of discussing equity and access in schools for students of color that has roots within the African American intellectual tradition (e.g., Cooper, 1892; Buthane, 1938; DuBois, 1903; Truth, 1851; Woodson, 1933). These roots, while often missed within the historical reconstruction of the field (Brown & Brown, 2010; Gordon, 1993; Wozolek, 2015), are important not only because they offer a perspective on social justice in schools but they are also telling of the implications for broader sociocultural norms if such ideas and ideals are ignored. For example, numerous scholars in the African American tradition at the turn of the last century noted that, because injustices continued unabated in the classroom, a cultural acceptance of physical violence, discrimination, and marginalization of African Americans thrived (Cooper, 1892; Douglass, 1853; DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933). To describe such oppression and violence through schooling, these scholars utilized metaphors of ridicule (Cooper, 1892), choking (DuBois, 1926), and lynching (Woodson, 1933) to describe both the ways that schools reiterated and maintained broader sociocultural norms and values and to describe how permitting racialized curricula and daily marginalization in schooling normalized acts of discrimination and violent events outside of schools.
Similarly, at Bridgeport Senior High School, as at all schools, everyday occurrences within the classroom affected the events and understandings of places like the corridors. For example, the formal curriculum, or the knowledge intentionally delivered in schools (Apple, 1993; Page, 1991; Pinar et al., 1995), often functioned to present African American histories through the lens of slavery or civil rights. The null curriculum, or lessons that were specifically not taught in the school (Eisner, 1985; Flinders et al., 1986), included not only stories outside of the slavery-civil rights narrative for African Americans but also generally missed histories of women, regardless of race (Cooper, 1892; Gordon, 1993; Hendry, 2011), and people of color outside of African American stories (Davidson, 1994; Grinberg, Goldfarb, & Saavedra, 2005). The hidden curriculum, or the underlying culture of norms and values that students learn through schooling (Giroux & Penna, 1983; Jackson, 1968), was greatly affected by formal and null curricula that consistently devalued the multiplicity of narratives of students of color, a combination that further marginalized specific groups like girls and Latin@s. This enacted a curriculum (Gershon, 2013b; Page, 1991; Schwab, 1969) of racialized and gendered ideas and ideals among students, staff and administration.

Racialized and gendered understandings permeated all aspects of the everyday experiences that students of color encountered at Bridgeport. Whether through an administrator separating Bridgeport appropriate behavior from “ghetto” behavior, teachers making references to students through the “N” word, or Anglo students articulating their views of people of color being the “downfall of society,” the idea that the students’ of color differences were deficits was a normalized and pervasive
understanding throughout the school. This is significant because it is through a
difference as deficit model that dominant groups gain success that is predicated on the
failure of non-dominant, often non-Whitestream groups (Delpit, 2005; Oakes, 1985;
was broadly defined in ways that that tended to position girls of color in a double bind,
simultaneously “caught” by racial biases on one hand and gender bias on the other.

For example, in moments when students of color were simply being themselves
without intentionally working to disrupt rules and procedures as is common among all
high school students, students of color were often understood by others (peers, teachers,
administrators) to act inappropriately according to sociocultural norms at the school. A
few examples of students’ failure to adopt and conform to these norms are demonstrated
by John’s decision to hug an Anglo girl in the hallway after school or Raquel’s consistent
“acting out” by voicing her opinion in ways that cut across understandings of Anglo
femininity and voice, as described in Chapter 3. The students’ decisions to “be” against
such norms often positioned them for failure in the opinion of the administration and staff
and, as a result, often led to punitive measures. As Varenne and McDermott (1998)
argued:

The child’s act has been recognized and identified as a particular kind of act that
must lead to further actions by possibly a host of other people. In certain schools
but not in others, the act-made-into-an-instance-of-school-failure can itself be
used as a token justifying an even more consequential identification. (p. 5)
In the case of students of color at Bridgeport, the “further action” Varenne and McDermott (1998) described ranged from verbal warnings to detentions or suspensions, dependent on “where the student fit in the discipline ladder,” according to three of the administrators interviewed during the study. Where they fit on the ladder was often dependent on prior acts, many of which were not acceptable for the norms identified by Anglo, heterosexual, male ideas and ideals that often pervade such values in schools (Varenne & McDermott, 1998). As children climbed up rungs on the discipline ladder, it often resulted in a “more consequential identification” of their ways of being. For example, if a student acted in a way that was considered outside of sociocultural norms, like greeting the class loudly, they began moving up the discipline ladder. Eventually their acts were viewed as “trouble” and the student was labeled in a high behavioral risk group. Though it should be noted that many of their actions were a choice, as we all have agency in the ways we re-act, these movements up the discipline ladder often positioned students of color so that their “black face was seen as a curse” (Woodson, 1933, p. 8).

While it in theory functioned as a sorting mechanism from “good” and “bad” behaviors from which students of color could either escalate or reduce punishment, the “discipline ladder” at Bridgeport was more likely to serve as an entrance through which students entered the school-to-prison pipeline. At Bridgeport High School, there were two ladders, one to success understood as a college career and another as moving up the rungs to the school-to-prison pipeline. For example, in Matthew’s case, as he felt teachers did not care about him, he started disrupting class. These disruptions moved him quickly up the discipline ladder and as he moved up the ladder and felt constricted by
such punishments, he acted out more often by doing things like cutting class. His actions eventually became severe enough that he started being suspended and expelled and, toward the end of the year, spent a few days in juvenile detention. As scholars have argued, this pipeline utilizes the inequities in schools, which are often based on factors such as race and class, to begin a process that will position students of color to have an increased chance at future incarceration (Christle et al., 2005; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014). Because the discipline ladder often penalized students of color for ways of being that were antithetical to Anglo expectations, they were far more likely to climb the ladder quickly and remain at higher levels where punitive actions were more severe than their Anglo peers.

John’s situation with hugging an Anglo female student presents another salient example of this movement from a local school ladder to the school-to-prison pipeline. As John and other students reflected on the incident, it was because of his race that John’s hugging of an Anglo girl was considered sexual assault by the administration rather than those of a teenage boy taking flirting with a girl a step too far, as so often happens in the daily life of high schools\(^\text{10}\). The decision to expel him from school for a long period of time was therefore in line with other encounters he had with the office for other offenses and fit well into the discipline ladder. Though it should be noted that in his narrative that was verified by other participants, his list of offenses included skipping class, stealing French fries from the cafeteria, and being too demanding when asking a teacher for spare

\(^{10}\) To be clear, as discussed in Chapter 3, this is not a “boys will be boys” discussion that excuses sexual acts or negates girls’ rights to their own bodies. Specifically I am attending to questions of race and gender as they intersect discipline.
lunch money but did not include physical acts of violence, sexual or otherwise, against other students. As a result, John’s concern became that his next “mistake interacting with White girls” would position him for juvenile detention rather than suspension or expulsion.

Scholars have long argued that there are multiple underlying reasons that both boys and girls of color are more prone to be channeled into the school-to-prison pipeline than their Anglo peers (Christle et al., 2005; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Fasching-Varner et al., 2014). For example, as Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda (2012) noted, females of color are far more likely to be under surveillance and “gendered consequences of disciplinary and push-out policies” (p. 5). They continued by explicating the idea that the punishments girls receive are for far less serious infractions than not only their Anglo female peers but than their male peers of color.

These and other such arguments are congruent with my observations during the year I studied at Bridgeport. Boys were more likely to fall under the guidelines that constructed the discipline ladder than girls. However, girls were more susceptible to receiving disciplinary consequences for infractions centered on ways of being outside Anglo, feminine ideals. To be clear, I am not arguing that boys somehow were missed. They certainly faced retribution for behavior that was not considered acceptable for Anglo norms and values, like Damari receiving punishment for loudly greeting the class, despite his complaint that his Anglo peers were also engaged in conversation, as class had not yet formally begun. Girls, however, were not only punished for similar actions as boys, for example, “being too loud” (Lei, 2003), but faced additional punishments for any
actions that stepped outside of the norms of feminine ways of being, like wearing their hair a particular way common among girls of African descent or being accused of wearing the “wrong pants” when they wore the exact kind of form-fitting leggings as their White female peers.

This is significant because boys of color were in trouble for “acting Black” by engaging in a particular performativity of Blackness, as was the case for boys in Little Africa frightening Anglo freshmen with an “angry Black man” stereotype in Chapters 3 and 4. Boys of color were upset because, as noted in Chapter 4, Anglo students often were able to “act Black” without consequence, by using the “N” word or using Black vernacular in places as public as the morning announcements for example. However, if boys of color acted in the same way, actions that both they and their Anglo peers associated with Black ways of being, their actions were perceived negatively by their peers and with potentially punitive measures by staff. Girls of color were also often in trouble for acting Black but, perhaps more significantly, they were in trouble for simply being Black, like having Black bodies that were exoticized in yoga or pajama pants that were common for all girls at Bridgeport. During the course of the study, boys of color were able to sag their pants and, according to data collected from participants, not once during the year I studied at Bridgeport were boys of color pulled aside or sent to the office for their wardrobe choices. Girls of color were therefore far more constrained by not only their actions in very similar ways to boys of color at Bridgeport but also became shackled by their bodies and other ways of being that were impossible to change. For
example, despite relaxing their hair, the differences between African American or Latina hair were noted by Anglo students.

In writing about the oppression of Black peoples, Woodson (1933) noted that, “if you control a man’s [sic] thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions . . . He will find his ‘proper place’ and will stay in it” (p. 5). Through experiences like finding derogatory pictures drawn about their bodies from peers or staff members noticing the presence of their Black bodies in negative or exoticizing ways, students of color quickly found their “proper place” in the school. This place was often in Little Africa or places like the restrooms and pulled into groups and away from Anglo peers. It should be noted that despite the cultural differences between students who lived in Hawks Corner or Smithville, city or suburban upbringing, students of color felt enough pressure that these differences were set aside during school hours in order to cope with the pressure of school life. Similarly, Tatum (2003) argued that as students of color receive increased pressure from racialized sociocultural norms and values in schools, questions about the intersection of who they are and who they are expected to be are addressed in safe spaces and places. In other words, students utilized safe spaces to openly discuss the pressures of their differences in normalized Anglo places. Little Africa functioned as a place for students of color to, as Tatum explained, dialogue about these norms and the affect that they had on students’ daily experiences.

Little Africa also functioned as a specific place where, as student and staff participants articulated, generations of students of color regularly met to discuss the inequities in school. As the physical location and sociocultural position of Little Africa
seldom changed, this increased the possibilities of staff and administrative surveillance of the group of students of color. In other words, as students of color are met with daily hostile aggressions in school, they set aside what in other contexts might have otherwise turn into physical violence to battle the everyday racism of schooling. It is these aggressive interactions that necessitated students of color carving out the safe space of Little Africa. In yet another ironic twist, the concentration of Black bodies in one area, which were implicitly and explicitly othered through sociocultural norms and values so much so that they needed to find a place to be safe while at school, become a point of concern for administration and therefore a place to observe after school. In sum, the pressures of daily aggressions in school positioned students to carve out safe spaces but the use of such spaces and places became a point of interest for administration. This interest caused increased observation of these areas and, in turn, increased the anxiety students of color felt at school.

**Too Black for School: Negotiating Surveillance, Inequities, and Identities**

Where the previous section explicat ed the anxiety students of color felt that spurred the creation of particular safe spaces and places in school, in this section I discuss how and why students of color traversed the boundaries and borders of schooling. In the literature review and throughout Chapters 3 and 4 I used the term “negotiation” to refer to the kinds of ordinary, everyday interactions between local actors in and through which they work together to make meaning and understand one another, constructions that were further contextualized by layers of sociocultural norms and values. As with any negotiation, there are potential gains and losses for the negotiators. Further, while power
is ubiquitous (Freire, 1970), and enacted on students of color at Bridgeport in particularly marginalizing ways, the participants certainly used their agency (Ortner, 2006) to enact how, when, and for what gains they traversed these boundaries and boarders.

There are two primary aspects that underpinned students’ negotiation of schooling at Bridgeport Senior High School. The first is a question of fields and cultural capital. As Bourdieu (1993) argued, “fields” refers to the sociocultural arena on which local actors enact and interact with power, norms and values, and cultural capital. The second is a question of how students of color worked with and against sociocultural norms to enact a presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) within the fields.

As explained in the literature review, although the image of a “field” seems rather static and defined, here I am using the concept of fields that is more akin to Massey’s (2005) work on space that argues for a framework of fluid interactions that are driven but not always defined by boundaries and borders. Further, such fields are not a product of static contemporary contexts but rather dependent on socio-historical and political underpinnings (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Massey, 2005; Visweswaran, 2010). This is significant because, at Bridgeport, students, staff, and administration were certainly affected by local and less local communities as well as contemporary and historical contexts. Similarly, students of color negotiated fields in school that were knotted with curricular forms and ideals constructed from such ways of knowing. This framing of the social fields construction links these sets of broader norms and values to the social interactions of local actors and within the knot of schooling to reflect how these
concentric circles of spaces and places “jointly produce educational effects” (p. xi) and affect students.

As students of color traversed the contours of schooling, they used their agency and cultural capital to negotiate daily experiences within a structure of power that marginalized their voice, being and knowing through current and historically bound contexts (Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Visweswaran, 2010; Watkins, 2001; Winfield, 2007). However, it should be noted that although there is no outside of power (Foucault, 1978), local actors always have a degree of agency in which they enact their cultural capital (Ortner, 2006). Therefore, cultural capital is always conditional within the fields where power and capital is in action. This is true for all local actors, regardless of factors like race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, native language, or ability. However, with increased social marginalization of a particular group, the conditions under which one’s cultural capital can be nullified increases.

Cultural capital is traditionally utilized to discuss the non-financial assets that an individual possesses or can gain in order to more successfully traverse the sociocultural power structures. For example, at Bridgport, male students of color utilized athletic ability to gain peer, staff, and administrative respect. This increased respect opened up further social possibilities. Here I use the term “conditional cultural capital” to refer to the ways that cultural capital is always subject to fall apart based on broader sociocultural power dynamics that are most likely out of the local actor’s control.
Assuming the Position Under the Conditions:

Cultural Capital and Being Black and Male

For students of color at Bridgeport, conditional cultural capital was both significant to broader understandings of sociocultural norms and resonant with students’ everyday experiences. Males of color, for example, utilized the conditional cultural capital of athletics, gender, the performativity of Blackness, and academics to create safe spaces and garner degrees of social mobility. What is important about the use of this capital is not only to understand how it successfully created safe spaces for male students but also to discuss how the broader conditions of schooling urged the failure of this agency.

As described in the previous chapters, Bridgeport was particularly oriented toward the promotion of academics and athletics. Although this is not particularly different from other high schools in the Midwest, I am specifically attending to the use of these two factors as a mechanism for marginalization in the school. The academic success of the students awarded the school an “excellent” rating by standardized test ranking and by the large percentage of students who go to colleges and universities. Additionally, the stress of a state and nationally sanctioned possibility of merit pay that would connect teachers’ salaries to student test scores often highlighted the “testing problems” in the school, which were often described in terms of gender, race, and ability. Students of color, particular boys, that could perform in the academic arena became the exception to the rule among their peers of color and were given a degree of capital to move more freely within the building. However, as Matthew encountered, the
expectation of academic failure often became the condition under which the drive to succeed was outweighed by socio-historical roots and the current racialized hidden curriculum that devalued the ways of knowing of students of color.

In this case, the hidden curriculum constantly and consistently devalued students like Matthew’s skills and knowledges in school. As a result, an underlying expectation of academic failure existed for the students of color, as demonstrated by the data presented in Chapter 4. These expectations were implicit in staff members’ attitudes toward students of color and explicit in things like the presentation of such failure to staff members at meetings. If students of color were “good students,” they were, like their Anglo peers, often not questioned as they moved around the building during class periods. However, if they were “bad students,” any attempt of success was ultimately measured by the pre-determined understanding of their failure and the ability to failure became the likely prophecy rather than the ability to succeed.

Athletically, boys of color gained a particularly large amount of cultural capital through sports. The normalization of athletic pride in the school along with, as several sound files described, the pervasive ideas and ideals of the “Black athlete” among Anglo students promoted an appreciation, and almost an expectation, for males of color to be athletically talented. The boys used this cultural capital to move more freely about in spaces and places like the hallway and the gym. Additionally, as Da’von explained, they utilized the image of the “Black athlete that was not with the thugs” as a tool to expand their space within the school. An example of this expansion of space was articulated in Chapter 3 as athletes of color were able to utilize spaces like the gym. However, as John
explained in his file “the only athlete of color” and as others iterated, the condition of this cultural capital was largely dependent on the athletic success of their Anglo peers and often led to feeling of exclusion and anxiety among athletes of color. In sum, what students articulated was an understanding that their athletic success rarely could surpass that of their Anglo peers and, when it did, they were met with further aggressions from jealous peers.

Finally, as it was noted several times in the data analysis chapters, Anglo students utilized African American stereotypes in aspects of their language (e.g., using the “N” word to other Anglos, using African American Vernacular in the video announcements), as a means to imitate forms of Black culture as propagated by the media. Anglo students often expressed that this behavior was acceptable at school only and that “acting ghetto” at home would simply not be tolerated. Although these actions went generally un-noticed as racialized acts by staff and administration, students of color expressed being deeply disturbed that their peers could get away with “acting Black” but they were in trouble for “being Black.” Aligned with Goffman’s (1959) discussion of presentations of self, male students of color used these cultural ideas and ideals of being Black and performed images of the “angry Black man” regularly to create space within Little Africa from their Anglo peers. The issue was that boys of color could not use the same sociocultural expressions of self that their Anglo peers were free to use. In doing so they were considered “too Black” and their movements were further restricted by administrative surveillance and peer aggression. However using the capital of their race and culturally racialized images of Black men compromised the overall space that male students of
color were given by the staff and administration. In John’s example, an act of flirtation was taken as an act of aggression and was quashed immediately and without apology. In sum, the use of such behavior did gain male students of color some wiggle room from stultifying school norms and values. However, it nonetheless called attention to the boys as behaving outside of school norms and values in ways that pushed them up the ladder to the school-to-prison pipeline.

**Conditional Movement: Constraints at the Intersection of Race and Gender**

The conditions of girls’ cultural capital were most strongly determined by the intersection of race and gender. In the previous section I described how conditional cultural capital functioned specifically for boys of color is to build an understanding of how questions of race often trumped available capital. Here I focus on how girls of color consistently faced marginalization based on race that was further compounded by questions of gender. In the example of female athletes of color, their athletic status produced social mobility within local expectations of race and athletic ability and the school’s promotion of such talents but did not open up the same physical mobility within the school as it did for boys of color. While boys teased each other between spaces of the gym and the hall, athletic girls of color remained rather immobile within the safe space afforded by Little Africa but unable to use their capital to garner the same amount of social mobility or physical space as did boys of color at Bridgeport High.

Perhaps the most important kind of cultural capital that girls of color worked to possess was what they described as “acting White.” As discussed throughout Chapters 3 and 4, the distinction children made to “act White” in order to garner affirming attention
from Anglo staff, students, and administrators, aligns well with the “Whiteness as property” dialogue in both legal and curriculum studies scholarship (Burbas, 2011; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Haynes Writer, 2008; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). This scholarship and the data from this study supported the idea that “acting White” through speech patterns, hairstyles, and actions was an attractive trait to possess in order to better negotiate schooling. In particular, girls of color openly expressed the need to do things like relax or straighten their hair, speak without using African American Vernacular, or “be on their best behavior” in order to “pass” in school. Additionally, “acting White” included decisions to avoid listening loudly to music, rapping, or joking too loudly with their friends. This is not to say that girls of color should have changed their ways of being. To be clear, I am not arguing for some “ Dangerous Minds,” “Stand and Deliver,” or “Freedom Writers” movie-like context where shifts in one’s way of being is the only key to educational success. Rather, I am attending to the everyday difficulties girls of color faced as they needed to conform to Anglo feminine ideals of self in order to have the slightest amount of wiggle room in an otherwise stultifying context.

Girls of color expressed several advantages of “acting White.” First, several participants expressed the ability to get excessive passes from teachers to leave class without receiving too many questions from staff. As Raquel noted, “The Blacker I act, the less I get the hell outta class.” This comment was in reference to the fact that she could more quickly get passes to physically leave the classroom. Further, girls of color expressed getting less pushback in academic fields as they “acted Whiter.” For example,
as Raquel explained in the previous chapter, acting White not only granted girls of color access away from class but they felt it accorded them greater respect and equity among staff members. Although participants discussed similar stories to Sierra’s articulation of her frustration with the staff member’s surprise at her ability to read, they equally discussed the opportunities that “acting White” brought in school for girls of color.

However, much like the boys of color expressed the tensions between Smithville and Hawks Corner, girls of color were deeply aware of the difficulties that female transfer students of color faced as they worked to assimilate into a predominantly Anglo, suburban culture. As Brianna explained,

> We don’t act White at home but I was raised here. I know what is expected at school. And, I guess in lots of ways, it’s just a part of who I am now. I couldn’t go live with my cousins in the city. But these girls who move in, they don’t know the first way to start acting properly.

To be clear, “acting properly” in this context is not a reference to “acting Black” or “acting White.” Rather, it is an articulation of “acting feminine.” Though in this context such actions were tied to Anglo ideals, it positions girls within a secondary marginalizing space of gender. Girls of color either conformed for a particular set of ideas and ideals about girls’ behavior at school or they were unable to adapt sufficiently. Girls of color who were unable to make these changes in their ways of being often fell quickly into the school-to-prison pipeline or on the first steps of “discipline ladder.”

Although the learning how to “act White” was a skill that was important to all students of color at Bridgeport, it was particularly significant for girls. This is because
acting White facilitated access to leave class but also to an expectation that they could possibly compete in academic pursuits with their Anglo peers. Further, while boys of color could play into normalized ideas and ideals of masculinity and Blackness and gain space for their actions, girls could not. In fact, for girls of color at Bridgeport, one of the only certain ways to gain such space was by working toward being/becoming within an ideal of Whiteness as a possession of being that would create cultural capital within the school.

As discussed in Chapter 4, as girls of color “acted White” they continued to gain access to academic capital. By this I mean that girls of color explicitly argued that attending to Anglo ideas and ideals of femininity and being helped in teachers’ perceptions of their ability to perform in academics. Returning to Raquel’s comments from Chapter 4, girls of color openly explained that if they wanted to “get an A, all [they had] do is be White.” As she continued her monologue, she demonstrated a few of the key aspects of what it meant to “be White” in her opinion by pulling her hair back tight and speaking with precise, genteel phrases.

Female participants of color who described school as “not a problem” often carried themselves in similar ways as a part of their natural approach to interacting with staff and administration. Although this way of being carried into their peer interactions in group interviews and was observable in the hallway interactions, when girls “slipped into Team Dark Skin,” as Brianna joked, “they look[ed] around, hoping no one [saw] what they became” for a moment in school. Similar to Goffman’s (1959) description of the versions of self that local actors present in their everyday lives, girls of color were
constantly and consistently concerned with the perception that “Blackness” placed on their identities at school, which were directly related to their success as students. In other words, those who did not perform the roles often found themselves quickly on the school-to-prison pipeline. Those who conformed to such ideas and ideals of ways of being for girls more easily attained levels of academic success, as it was defined in state standards.

In sum, while “acting White” functioned as cultural capital to help girls of color attain certain aspects of social and academic success, much like the cultural capital employed by the boys of color, it was conditional. Girls of color explicitly expressed feeling angry when describing the conditions under which their academic cultural capital fell apart. This conditional cultural capital failed for girls as they could aspire to Whiteness but could never be “White enough” in their physical bodies or the way they ultimately were in the world. The girls were acutely aware that despite relaxed hair or avoiding yoga pants, they were still a minority in the school and their differences were openly noted and Othered within the school. Girls often articulated the impossibility of actually being White past the mere performance of acting White. In other words, despite their best attempts to “pass,” their race would never completely allow complete legitimization of their ways of being. Just as it was impossible for them to escape their gender and the sexist ways that Bridgeport operated, no matter how hard they tried, they could never be White enough for their Blackness not to be conceptualized as a problem by peers, teachers, and administrators alike.
Why “Be” If You’ll Never Pass?: Agency and the Underlife

As Gutierrez and Rymes (1993) discuss Goffman’s (1961) work on asylums, they articulated that participation in the underlife of the institution includes a “range of activities that people develop to distance themselves from the surrounding institution” (p. 451). Gaining participation in the underlife means that to varying degrees a local actor will play into pre-defined sociocultural ideas and ideals of her role within the institution (Goffman, 1961). By attending to these roles the status quo is fulfilled, giving local actors a certain amount of space to participate in nonconforming ways of being within the institution (Goffman, 1961). For example, athletic boys of color consistently attended to the normalized ideas and ideals of the “Black super-star athlete” that were perpetuated through the hidden curriculum at Bridgeport. In terms of body image, this is significant because just as female bodies were exoticized, Black, athletic, male bodies were also valued. The null curriculum of images of African slaves being sold off to plantation owners in this case was rooted in the hidden curriculum of professional athletes being placed on public “blocks” and being auctioned off to team owners. The racialized hidden value of the male, Black athletes at Bridgeport was therefore a reflection of the null curriculum at school and broader cultural events like the draft that were valued among students and staff in the school.

As boys utilized their peers’, teachers’, and administrators’ ideas about what it meant to be male, Black, and an athlete, they further worked within labels of the “angry Black male.” This gave them the room to “act tough” while largely avoiding administrative and staff scrutiny for actions for which their non-athletic peers often faced
punishment. Along with the ability to perform such roles was the reward of social space to participate in the underlife. Boys of color who overly attended to the “angry Black male” stereotype and not to Anglo expectations of subservience by students of color were often pulled away from the underlife either through punitive measures on the discipline ladder or administrative disruptions during their time in Little Africa or wandering the halls.

There are two important factors at play within the participation within these roles. The first is that it is important to remember that performing these roles is an act of agency and a presentation of oneself in order to satisfy status quo norms and values (Goffman, 1959). Students of color, particularly those who were raised in the suburban community, were acutely aware of these behavioral expectations of being and knew how and when they needed to be satisfied. Students of color who moved in from urban spaces were often under pressure to learn the new context and struggled to understand the ideals of Blackness being presented to them through the hidden curriculum. For example, as Sierra explained with indignation, in the sound file “Do you take drugs?,” she did not understand how race was a marker for drug use and had difficulty understanding how playing into such images could be helpful.

Swidler’s (2001) cultural toolkit analogy is helpful here. Swidler discussed the idea of a cultural toolkit as a set of tools that all local actors are given. In this analogy all students are given the same set of sociocultural tools regardless of their ability to negotiate the use of such tools or the need for other tools in a given context. Here, students of color utilized tools to negotiate normalized ideas and ideals that were
predominantly about Black culture. For, as it was discussed throughout Chapters 3 and 4, students of color were often classified as African American regardless of their actual race or culture, particularly if they were bi-racial Latin@s. Students who were raised in this suburban context were far more prepared and conditioned to use tools to negotiate these roles than their transfer student counterparts. As a result, transfer students were far more likely to miss the ability to participate fully in the underlife of the school, as they did not attend to the prescribed roles of being. In sum, the same cultural toolkit that facilitated students raised in the suburban context also prohibited the participation for urban transfer students.

Second, the existence of such roles relate to Mills’ (1998) discussion on social ontology where one’s way of being is socioculturally constructed within pre-defined expectations. As Mills discussed, social ontology is a predefined social construction of the way one can be in the world. It is an imposed glass ceiling for one’s ways of being, or to use Mills’ term, “subpersons” of a society. Here it is described as the underlife of the institution. While local actors play into these roles for their own benefit within the broader context of the school, they also participate within the reification of their own social ontologies. Or, as the one administrator noted in his interview, such stereotypes have a base. As students, administrators, and staff observe students playing into such social ontologies, they often felt justified in their racialized understandings of students of color. In sum, there would be no Little Africa without the participation of students of color in the reification of social ontologies, ideas and ideals, both those that are positively
affirming and those that negatively reaffirm differences their ways of being and knowing as both behavioral and academic deficits.

Students’ participation in the underlife of the institution opened up two significant spaces within the school. The first are what Goffman (1961) called “surveillance spaces,” which were defined as an area that students needed no excuse to be in, but were “subject to the usual authority and restrictions of the establishment” (p. 228). In this case, while they needed an excuse to be in places like Little Africa during class times, one of the restrictions of the establishment was a required pass to be in common areas like the hall and the cafeteria during instructional hours. This requirement was, of course, listed for the broader safety of the school but rarely restricted students’ movements around the building.

Little Africa was established in a surveillance space. By this I mean that Little Africa exists in the hallway where there are cameras and opportunity for staff and administrative observation. As discussed in the data analysis chapters, the consistent iterations of Little Africa in surveillance spaces were particularly important to the interruption of the in group difference between boys of color. These divergences centered predominantly on cultural variances between urban and suburban children and the subsequent questions of masculinity. As boys played into a social ontology of masculinity and Blackness that required physical aggression as a display of dominance described above, the surveillance space of Little Africa offered at least one reason not to engage in physical aggression. In other words, they did not engage in physically violent acts because they were being watched and because it was a safe space that was respected
within the group. Whether it was through the cafeteria in the morning or Little Africa’s position in the hall in the afternoon, such surveillance became an underpinning rationale for non-violent conflict resolution.

As the boys of color pushed at the edges of aggressive behavior turning violent, the administration utilized their actions to justify the space as a point of observation. This is similar to how Massey (2005) described two maps, with are depictions of the same space but from varying perspectives of history, politics and trajectories—one drawn by the Aztecs and the other drawn by the Spanish. The ways in which administrators and staff perceived the space known as Little Africa and the students of color who populated it, their racialized conceptual map of students’ ways of being was not wrong. As discussed before, students did indeed play into their social ontologies. Such actions aligned with and furthered administrative understandings of their ways of being. However, much like the Spanish in an Aztec empire, administration and staff were able to use their privilege to essentially ignore student of color perspectives and trajectories within the space in order to legitimize their mapping of space. In sum, the privilege of administrative power as it intersected with Anglo ways of knowing supported administrators’ ignorance of the perspectives and positions of students of color.

Yet, the use of the cafeteria in the morning or the hall throughout the day as “Little Africa” was not just an overarching excuse to avoid possible violence due to the very real potential of escalating in-group tensions. It was also a public claiming of space in an institution with racist understandings. Little Africa therefore functioned not only as a safe space where students of color could “be themselves” in school but as a public
proclamation of being in a marginalizing place called school. Students’ participation in
the underlife created by this safe space required their participation in socially prescribed
roles that simultaneously reified public ideals about students of color at Bridgeport High.
However, the student of color conceptualization of the space known as Little Africa was
often a claim of presence in a place their ways of being was intended to be absent. Much
like Massey’s (2005) maps of Mexico City, both maps are right but they are imbricated
with separate trajectories and histories.

In addition, Goffman (1961) presented areas he called “territorial jurisdictions” as
a socially partitioned space that permits local actors to relax away from sociocultural
demands of an institution. As students of color articulated throughout the study, Little
Africa was a territorial jurisdiction for students of color and LGBGTQ students from
Anglo students. In this way, it was both a territorial jurisdiction and a surveillance space.
Because it was both a territorial jurisdiction and a surveillance space, students of color
always needed to simultaneously keep up particular appearances and could never fully be
themselves as they might be off school grounds, as they had to maintain a certain image in
order to keep the public space. This meant that students’ ways of being were in constant
friction (Tsing, 2005) with sociocultural ideas and ideals. As Tsing argued, “as a
metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can
lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (p. 5). She continued to explain that
these encounters do not always produce positive or equal effects for all participants. In
terms of the friction between territorial jurisdictions and surveillance spaces, the claim of
a public space for students of color was in considerate dissonance to broader sociocultural
norms and values. In these ways, Little Africa made their doubled-consciousness explicit, a need to act according to Whitestream norms and values in order to keep and maintain space in a school organized to marginalize them through those same dominant ways of being and knowing.

In order to create safe spaces and utilize their agency to construct territorial jurisdictions as a means of negotiating schooling, girls of color used the bathroom as a partitioned space from boys and staff during the school day. Whereas the use of the bathroom provided a respite from many stresses and aggressions—from the everyday of being in a place where female ways of being were devalued to privately grieving sexual assault—it did not afford complete safety or privacy. For example, just as I heard the girls talking and singing in the bathroom, their presence in this space did not go completely unnoticed by peers, teachers, or administrators.

Goffman (1961) similarly argued that territorial jurisdictions are never completely unknown by those working in the institution but, rather, that they are ignored until the attention to such spaces become necessary in order to preserve and maintain institutional power. An instance of the maintenance of power against territorial jurisdictions became clear to me as an administrator explained that he was vaguely aware of such use of the bathroom but had recently decided to talk to some girls who were particularly loud there one afternoon.

Other examples of territorial jurisdictions from this study were the athletic boys of color using the gym or all students of color using my room as a relief from the everyday of schooling. What should be noted about these spaces of territorial jurisdiction is that
they presented the possibility for students to remove the protective layers of their roles as students of color within a predominantly Anglo space. In sum, they offered a safe space.

However, even these safe spaces did not exist without the possibility of surveillance. For example, in my room I was dually positioned as researcher and teacher—as both a participant observer and enforcer of school rules. In the gym, a space where boys of color often felt additional respect outside of their role as student, not only was their presence noted as a possible disruption to classes in session but their sound carried in the larger space. Further, as boys of color joked around at the end of the day by pushing each other into the gym, both the squeak of the door and the sound of laughter carried in the large space and were therefore noted among staff. My point here is that all places, even safe spaces, were points of possible surveillance for students of color. As students momentarily removed the shielding layers that permitted them to negotiate their differences in school, there remained a constant understanding that all spaces were surveillance spaces. This impacted students’ inter/actions in both safe and unsafe spaces and they could never fully “be” knowing that every movement could potentially be watched or heard.

Similarly, there was a price to pay for the creation of and the participation in safe spaces. For example, just as boys of color worked to negotiate ideas and ideals of masculinity, located in the in-between suburban and urban background and broader cultural understandings of Blackness, threats of violence within the group compromised their sense of safety. However, to “keep” Little Africa, participating boys had to keep playing particular roles that reinscribed these sociocultural understandings of their ways
of being and knowing that simultaneously reified their role(s). These roles in school pushed students into the discipline ladder and were largely responsible for the ontological death of many students of color. In short, the price students often paid for being in school at large was far greater than any price they paid for their (re)creation of and participation in Little Africa.

Vignettes in Their Words: Ambika and Jahmir’s Understandings of Living with Race in School

This is a map out of my [Ambika’s] day. I come to school late because, well, it’s hard to get up in the morning. You know what’s going to be at school, waiting for you. I enter the building through the performing arts center and go straight to the cafeteria, to Little Africa. When the music starts to play, I walk past the art hallway. I’m smiling because I’m walking to the main hallway to hang out in the other Little Africa before the bell rings. I walk up the stairs, into a hallway with
lots of classrooms. I’ve labeled nothing. Class means nothing to me. Then I got to math. I’m smiling here but only because it’s easier to smile, nod and be polite. He’s really not a good teacher anyway. Then I go to Honors European History. I’m not smiling on the way because I think the teacher says racist things sometimes. Now I go to Honors Language Arts. My smile is really gone. I draw myself small because here I feel small. Then I go to study hall. It’s one door to either sleeping or being made fun of because kids feel it is okay to use the “N” word there. They say it to me all the time. I’m not even Black. I’m Indian. So I’m sleeping in this picture. Then I go to lunch. I like lunch this year because everyone is in it and we can hang out together. I feel safe. Then I go to biology. I’m really not smiling here. The teacher doesn’t mean to be but he says things that make me feel uncomfortable. Like I should be smarter because I’m Asian and not one of “those kids.” Then I go to study hall, again. I didn’t draw another picture for this one. I don’t want to talk about how study hall is in the afternoon. Ok . . . I’ll just say that I can’t sleep so the other thing happens a lot. Then I go home. I am smiling again. My favourite part of the day is art class because I love art. Sometimes well . . . most of the time I hate school because they are judgmental ignorant people that think they are better than everyone else. I want to say this: racism goes beyond colour. RACISM GOES BEYOND COLOUR. And, I share hatred because of that.
I wake up in the morning and come to school through the doors near the gym. I’m late and so I never make it in time to go to the cafeteria. I just don’t want to come in until the last second. Why go to a place where they just think you’re a stupid nigger? I go to Mrs. M’s class. I drew her room because she continued to help me and proved to me that she was willing to push me and my friends forward. Then I go to the media center. It’s okay in there. Kids are not really watched so, to be honest, they call kids “niggers” a lot. Dirty niggers. Stupid niggers. Nappy niggers. You name it, they say it. Always under their breaths. Like I don’t hear. Like the teachers don’t hear. Anyway, then I go to Mrs. W. She’s ok. Then I go to the gym. I can pick the music there but the White kids are always complaining then. Our music is too “Black.” They don’t want to “be in a
class that’s like the ghetto.” Then I have lunch. I HATE it there. Kids throw food and blame it on you. You can’t tell the teachers because they already think you’re bad. I know, for a fact, that someone actually got a detention for not picking up a White kid’s food. Why refuse? So then I go to Woz’s class. Just to check in. Gotta check in with momma at least once a day. I like Woz. She took interest in me even when she didn’t know who I was or anything about me. She took the chance on a guy like me! Then I go to Little Africa again. It’s the place where everybody meets their friends and basically you get to know your own race and intermix with many of the people that do what you do. Then I go home. It’s tough because even in Little Africa they’re always looking at you. I just deal with it. You can’t change the way people look at you. I just move on. I go home and try not to think about it.

**Conclusion: Living With/In Marginalization**

At Bridgeport Senior High School students of color negotiated the spaces and places of a predominantly Anglo school through performances of self that were directly related to predetermined social ontologies, understandings that were in turn constructed through sociocultural norms and values. These performances were layers of protection that students of color utilized to help them negotiate a school that was at best restrictive but generally untenable toward their ways of being and knowing. It was therefore not simply a performance of self but a negotiation of self that exists at the intersection of “who one is” and the everyday of marginalization in school. Although it could be argued that all adolescents traverse terrains of identity and the awareness of sociocultural norms,
students of color in this context were positioned to perform such roles as an act of gaining safe spaces in school.

In context of scholarship related to schooling, this everyday concession of self and the consistent pressures of racialized curricula are significant to consider for at least the following reasons. First, scholars have noted that the school-to-prison pipeline is significant in understanding how schools are integral to the “life and death in our United ‘Carceral’ States of America conversation” (Fasching-Varner et al., 2014, p. 411). Although this dialogue is well theorized, it tends to lack the everyday narratives that begin students’ journey in the school-to-prison pipeline from which students of color rarely return. The data presented throughout Chapters 4 and 5 contribute empirical evidence about the ordinary, everyday ways in which students are pushed up discipline and other metaphorical ladders into the stream of prison-to-school pipelines. Given this gap, there are several possibilities in conducting future research that explores the ways that every day racist interactions in schools contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Further, it opens up the space for further consideration on and how other normalized everyday mechanisms in schooling (e.g., standardized testing, the formal curriculum or innate sociocultural norms) are un-intentionally designed for the successful failure (Varenne & McDermott, 1998) of students of color in schools.

Second, much attention has been paid to the recent success of girls of color in the entrance and continuation of higher education over their male counterparts (Buchmann, DiPrete & McDaniel, 2008; King, 2006; Slater, 1994). What is often lacking in the literature and presented here is a narrative of how girls of color assimilated behaviors of
“acting White” that allowed them to “pass” in school in order to validate their ways of being in the sociocultural landscape of schooling for Anglo peers, staff, and administration. In other words, by integrating a feminine, Anglo performance of self as part of their protective layers of being in school, girls of color conformed to norms and values that buttressed their potential cultural capital that gave them wiggle room for academic success. Yet girls of color simultaneously lost a part of themselves through this process, something understood in the struggle of transfer students as they worked tirelessly to conform. In this case, one might ask if what was lost is likely as significant as what was gained. Further attention to what students of color give up in order to be in schools like Bridgeport is significant because it potentially signals the damage of the oppressive inter-actions in schooling. Further, such research could identify not only how such oppressions have been used in the gain of cultural capital for particular populations (e.g., girls of color in higher education) and not for others (e.g., boys of color being left out of such accomplishments).

Finally, this study has called attention to the everyday ways that students of color are marginalized through schooling. As I have argued, this is a result of racialized curricula (formal, hidden, enacted, null) that did not recognize the ways of being and knowing of students of color as legitimate behaviors and interactions in schools, directly affecting students’ feeling of self-worth, reinscribing self-fulfilling prophecies. It is important to remember that these curricula affirmed Anglo students’ positionality and superiority, impacting students of color and their Anglo peers, staff, and administration as the social ontology of marginalized students was supported and continued through such
understandings. Specifically, Anglo students, like Jeff articulated in his file “the downfall of the world,” came to understand their peers through the same negative lens because of such curricula. While students of color operated under a social ontology, Anglo students, staff, and administration operated under collective memories (Winfield, 2007) that manifested within social epistemology. This is not to say that Anglo students do not operate under a social ontology. The curricula that enforced an ontology of dominance on students of color also enacted an ontology of being dominant for Anglo students. In short, all ontologies are socially constructed and therefore the authority of one group is inextricable to the control of another.

This is significant because, just as collective memories are socio-historically and politically bound (Winfield, 2007), they are held as much in one’s body as they are in the mind. By this I mean that one is as much affected by these collective memories in their ways of being as they are in their ways of knowing. Therefore, these memories are as ontological as they are epistemological. Just as all ontologies are socially constructed, all epistemologies are also necessarily social. However, part of privileging knowledge in a Western sense is that the social aspect of knowledge is hidden in plain sight. From this perspective, the social aspect of epistemologies tends to function as hidden curriculum. What Mills (1998) made explicit in his discussion on social ontology is the history of the African American intellectual tradition to attend to the social in understandings and interactions that are often considered personal.

During this study it became clear that the schools’ hidden curriculum affected parents of color and their own reification of social epistemologies. A salient example of
the iterations of these understandings occurred when the news of John’s incident surrounding his decision to hug an Anglo girl hit the community of students of color and their families. Many participants commented that their parents and guardians had serious discussions about school safety. For boys, these conversations included topics like why they should not be talking with Anglo girls, much less trying to date them or touch them. Girls received lectures about the dangers of dating White boys, explaining how they would not hesitate to take advantage of a girl of color and it would be considered the girl’s fault. The girls referenced Emma’s context where the boy’s family had blamed her for “leading him on as a girlfriend” and then not “knowing the consequences.”

As I listened to these stories, I could not help but to think about how this talk seemed as though it was pulled directly from conversations parents had with their children surrounding cases like the Scottsboro Boys, Ed Johnson, or Emmett Till, all situations where the central offense was a Black man touching, looking at, or being perceived to desire a White woman. John’s situation, as well as parents’ reactions, seemed to awaken a history of oppression that was heard within the null curriculum. As scholars have argued, it is the marginalization in school that engenders and maintains broader sociocultural constructs of racialized perspectives (Apple, 2006; Cooper, 1892; DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933; Watkins, 2001). A consistent discussion between participants was those of parents warning their children before school started each year of the dangers of being Black in school. Similarly, the parents viewed these examples as moments to protect their children from sociocultural understandings that could leave their child in prison, in John’s case, or sexually assaulted, in Emma’s case.
Schooling at Bridgeport Senior High School, therefore, became a mechanism through which children of color were at best scrutinized or publicly humiliated or, far worse, they had their ways of being and knowing publically and privately choked away. Further, acting according to Whitestream ways of being and knowing was at odds with the ways in which most Anglo students “acted more Black” than actual students of African descent. The hidden curriculum, and the other forms of curricula that indelibly
contributed to it, was one of both implicitly and explicitly making the lived experience of students of color “distorted and ugly” (DuBois, 1926, p. 9) in school.

A salient example of such distorted ugliness can be heard in the sound files above and read in the narratives beginning this section. At Bridgeport, for students of color, school is a place where their ways of being are so devalued that they either changed how they were in the world in order to gain wiggle room or they played into social images as a means to create any safe spaces possible. Unfortunately, as Ambika noted, the context created a sense of hatred because of racism. Or, as Jahmir wrote, students would just try to “go home and not think about [school].” The narratives given here are therefore more than just the everyday exhaustion students encountered from racist actions and words. In this case, the curriculum became the metaphoricall normalized noose that “killed children’s aspirations” (Woodson, 1933, p. 8) and positioned them within the shackles of sociocultural expectations. Girls of color, for example, were expected to layer their ways of being with Anglo understandings in order to get by. Boys of color were understood to be a nuisance, a trouble dealt with in order to safeguard the school.

The implicit and explicit ways that students were metaphorically suffocated at Bridgeport can be heard in the students’ voices above. Students of color were aware that their race was considered undesirable. This was a felt reality as they encountered racist actions and words from their peers and staff. The everyday aggressions students encountered that produced anxiety and exhaustion was at least an ontological degradation and at most a metaphorical lynching that acted to suppress the qualities or persons deemed undesirable through schooling. In Damari’s context, his decision to be
physically aggressive was in many ways a direct result of an ongoing background of everyday oppression that exterminated his educational future and exemplified the consequences for such behavior. As Woodson (1933) noted, this is educational lynching that killed not only his academic self but also put serious hurdles in his life outside of school, not the least of which was his incarceration. Although it was a different kind of death for girls of color at Bridgeport, loss of self, identity, positive understandings of female-ness, deaths that were often less public than the boys’ were no less tragic or final. In the common narratives of so many girls of color, these deaths of self were far more private and carried out in the seclusion of offices or Saturday detentions where their bodies exoticized and the ways they were in the world were smothered until nothing was left but the image of a “good girl.” In these and other such ways, education for students of color at Bridgeport High was in fact not-so-subtle acts of racialized violence against a small percentage of students based primarily on their race. This is significant as it not only highlights the everyday oppressive experiences that students of color experienced at Bridgeport but also because, as Woodson (1933) reminded us:

To handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one’s aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime. It is strange, then, that the friends of truth and the promoters of freedom have not risen up against the present propaganda in the schools and crushed it. This crusade is much more important than the anti-lynching movement, because there would be no lynching
if it did not start in the schoolroom. Why not exploit, enslave, or exterminate a class that everybody is taught to regard as inferior? (Woodson, 1933, p. 3)

As social media and news sources continue to report on the recent atrocities that occur against Black lives in the United States, Woodson’s (1933) quote above continues to resonate with the everyday experiences of students of color as they intersect with local and less local social concerns.

Students of color live daily oppression in schools. They are oppressed through what is learned (formal curriculum), what is left out (null curriculum), and the school culture that reinscribes the sociocultural ideas and ideals about Blackness (hidden curriculum). Perpetuating such understandings, at the end of four years, some students will likely decide to go to college in order to become teachers. Understandings about privilege, equity, and access, the very absences articulated throughout this dissertation, are often left out of teacher education programs and these students’ privileged understandings of being and Blackness will continue into the classroom.

Meanwhile, at the end of four years, students of color have had much of their ways of being and knowing suffocated. Some students in this study, primarily girls, have knowingly traded a suffocation of their African American female selves for success at school, an understanding that tends to carry with it a distain for the Blackness that furthers their sociocultural ability to “act White,” which is in itself ultimately an impossibility. This is significant because as they continued to trade suffocation for the conditional cultural capital of “acting White,” their own ways of being ceased to exist. In
sum, as Woodson (1933) would argue, Bridgeport was successful in educationally lynching many of its girls of color.

Other students in this study, most often boys, have been funneled into school and social disciplinary structures that set the stage for their entire lives. As described throughout this dissertation, many of these students have fallen in to ways of being, everyday actions and interactions that reified stereotypical norms of Blackness. That they have done so by choice does not in any way negate either that this is a mechanism to negotiate being in school or very likely not the series of choices they wished to make. They have been ontologically choked. While their ways of being may have resisted and survived, the feeling of being choked into an ontological straight jacket of sociocultural expectations has already become a part of how they are in the world.

In sum, this study is significant because it documents presences and absences in school that simultaneously normalize broader social ontologies and work to fix sociocultural ideas and ideals of Blackness onto yet another generation of young black bodies and minds at school. For this and other reasons presented throughout this dissertation, this work yet again calls for greater understandings of the everyday contribution of schooling to ontological choking and educational lynching of young women and men of color. If these reifications of culture continue unabated, as Woodson (1933) noted, there will be no end to the violence against Black bodies in school or in society.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

SOUND FILES LINKED TO PARTICIPANTS AND WEB ADDRESSES FROM CHAPTER 3
## Appendix A

### Sound Files Linked to Participants and Web Addresses From Chapter 3

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APPENDIX B

SOUND FILES LINKED TO PARTICIPANTS AND WEB ADDRESSES FROM CHAPTER 4
### Appendix B

**Sound Files Linked to Participants and Web Addresses From Chapter 4**

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APPENDIX C

SOUND FILES LINKED TO PARTICIPANTS AND WEB ADDRESSES FROM

CHAPTER 5
## Appendix C

### Sound Files Linked to Participants and Web Addresses From Chapter 5

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