Examining the Educational Experiences of High-Achieving Lakota Youth

by

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ABSTRACT

To date, the bulk of the scholarly research on Native American educational achievement has focused on explaining the underachievement of Native American youth. While these studies are valuable in identifying the barriers that students face, they are problematic in that they are built upon theories that would suggest academic struggles for all students who encounter these barriers. Thankfully, we know that there are Native American students who, in spite of these barriers, achieve academic success. Given this fact, the purpose of this research was to examine the academic resilience of high-achieving members of one specific tribe, the Lakota, and to make sense of how these high-achieving Lakota students navigate potentials risk factors to their success.

In order to understand the experiences of these academically resilient students, I conducted interviews with 42 high-achieving juniors and seniors from high schools located across one of the five Lakota Reservations in South Dakota. These interviews spanned a variety of topics, including students' perceptions of racism and discrimination, their connectedness to their Lakota identity, their perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy, their belief in the value of education, and their aspirations for the future.

Through these interviews, I found that these academically resilient students were similar in many ways outside of school. They all had strong support systems, believed in the value of education, and were confident that racism and discrimination were not going to keep them from

meeting their goals. However, their schooling experiences varied in important ways, with each school possessing different risk and protective factors that worked to shape students' resilience.

While each of these students successfully navigated the potential risk factors to their academic success, their beliefs in their future opportunities differed based on the academic expectations within their school and the post-secondary support that they received. As a result, these students, who were similar in a number of ways outside of school, left school feeling very differently about their preparation for college. These findings add important insights into the dynamic nature of resilience and the role of schools in shaping the educational experiences and aspirations of their students.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Discussions of the achievement gap permeate the educational discourse. Determining how to improve the educational outcomes of non-Asian minority students is a constant topic in research and is an issue that guides decision-making at the local, state, and federal level. Unfortunately, this discussion of the achievement gap is often framed around how Black and Hispanic students are doing relative to their white peers (Franzak, 2006; O'Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009). This framing is problematic for a number of reasons, including the normalization of white achievement as the standard of comparison, as well as the way that it shifts attention and research away from other minority groups. As Franzak (2006) notes, "While the urban education researchers have brought much-needed attention to large populations of students placed at risk because of counter-productive educational practices, the needs of smaller populations of marginalized youth have largely gone unaddressed" (p. 222).

While it is perhaps logical to focus research efforts on the largest minority groups, as they are the groups most affected in number in terms of unequal academic opportunities and whose successes and failures are most often seen by the public, this absence of research on smaller populations has allowed the educational experiences of certain groups to become invisible, or at the very least, silenced, in the dialogue that exists around educational equity.

For Native Americans[1], this concern may be particularly pressing. Despite the absence of conversation around the educational experiences of Native American students, reports by the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that Native American students are facing academic challenges that are as extreme as any demographic group (Stetser & Stilwell, 2014). Stetser and Stilwell (2014) report that Native American students have a graduation rate of approximately 67%. This is in comparison to 69% for blacks, 73% for Hispanics, 86% for whites, and 88% for Asian/Pacific Islanders. Similarly, the 12.4% dropout rate for Native American students is higher than most other racial groups. Comparatively, the dropout rate is 4.2% for Asian/Pacific Islander students, 5.1% for white students, 8.0% for Black students, and 15.1% for Hispanic students (Aud et al., 2012).

These numbers are perhaps even more troubling given the fact that they do not include the 183 schools overseen by the Bureau of Indian Education, schools that on the whole have lower academic attainment rates than traditional public schools. For example, in the 2009-2010 school year, the graduation rate for Bureau of Indian Education schools was 57.73% (Bureau of Indian Education, 2011a), a number that was over 10 percentage points lower than the Native American graduation rate in public schools.

When taken as a whole, it seems clear that the challenges that Native Americans face in the United States educational system are as troubling as any group, yet their educational experiences remain largely silenced in the discourse.

[1] While the terms Native American and American Indian are both used in the research literature, the students I spoke with tended to refer to themselves as "Native." Consequently, I will utilize the term Native American rather than American Indian when speaking broadly about the population, or when researchers did not make it clear to which tribe they were referring. However, when possible, I will be specific about which tribe I am writing about.

Likely contributing to this lack of discussion is the fact that understanding the academic experiences of Native American students becomes quite complicated when one considers the fact that there are 566 federally recognized tribes. These 566 tribes vary in their cultures, religions, local economies, experiences with oppression, and in their relationships with the federal government. As a result of this complexity, it becomes an almost impossible task to talk about Native Americans as a collective whole, as such monolithic groupings often fail to capture the underlying, and more nuanced, factors that impact particular groups (O'Connor et al., 2009).

In response to this need for increased attention to the educational experiences of Native American students, as well as the need for greater tribal specificity when discussing Native Americans, I interviewed high-achieving (GPA of at least 3.0[2]) members of the Lakota tribe, a tribe found primarily in South Dakota, about their educational experiences. I selected this tribe not only because of their unique history and economic situation, conditions that set them apart from the Navajo tribe studied by Dehyle (1992, 1995), but also because of the fact that I grew up in South Dakota, taught in a town that borders one of the reservations, and upon completion of my degree, hope to continue my work with these communities. In short, I had a sincere interest, both personally and professionally, in understanding the educational experiences of these students. I am very hopeful that the schools I worked with found it beneficial to them as well.

Overview

Research that has examined the educational experiences of academically resilient Native American students are few and far between. In fact, in a 2006 study by LaFromboise and colleagues, the authors noted, "our review of the numerous works addressing resilience, found

[2] While this is an arbitrary measure of academic success, it is consistent with traditional standards used by educational researchers and it aligned with the way that many individuals within this reservation conceptualized academic success.

few empirical studies on resilience that focused solely on the American Indian population…and relatively few that even addressed it indirectly" (p. 195).

While the number of studies examining academic resilience among Native Americans has increased since 2006, there are no studies to my knowledge that have examined academic resilience among the Lakota. Given this paucity of research regarding the academic resilience of Native American students, and of Lakota students in particular, I believe this study addresses an important gap in the research literature.

While I will discuss the concept of resilience in much greater detail in Chapter Three, I feel it is important to offer a brief overview of the concept, as it is central to how I have framed this study. Resilience has been defined by Rutter (2006) as, "an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences" (p. 2). Within this definition, there are two points that are of particular importance. The first is that there is a relatively positive outcome. Resilience is dependent upon individuals experiencing positive outcomes relative to others within the same context. In the case of the students in this study, they have been selected based on their exceptional academic performance relative to others within their school.

The second aspect of this definition that is of particular importance is the notion of risk. Academic success alone is not enough to be considered resilient; this success has to occur in the presence of factors that may compromise the outcome in question. Given the aforementioned struggles of many Native American students (Aud et al., 2012; Bureau of Indian Education, 2012; Stetser & Stillwell, 2014), as well as the documented historical and contemporary risk factors that many Native American students face (Blum, Harmon, Harris, Bergeisen, & Resnick,

1992; Brave Heart, 2000; LaFromboise et al., 2006; LaFromboise & Howard-Pitney, 1995; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2005), I entered this study with the assumption that the institutionalized inequalities that have historically compromised the life chances of Native Americans would place the students on the Davenport Indian Reservation at systematic risk of educational underperformance. While statistically these students may have been at-risk for academic success, it is important to recognize that there were many students on the Davenport Indian Reservation who were doing very well in school. Consequently, in order to better understand the experiences of these students who were demonstrating academic success despite their statistical likelihood for underperformance, I entered this study with the hope of learning about the factors that supported these students in their academic success and post-secondary aspirations.

Research Questions and Design Overview

In order to begin to understand the factors that supported these students' academic resilience, I designed this study to examine how students' experiences, both inside and outside of school, worked to support their academic success and future aspirations. More specifically, I set out to investigate the following research questions:

1) What are the cultural, social, and institutional factors that support the educational achievement and aspirations of high-achieving Lakota youth?

2) How do the factors that support students' achievement and aspirations vary across schooling contexts?

As is evident in research question one, I was not interested in simply focusing on students' experiences inside of school, nor was I interested in focusing solely on how their home lives shaped their success. Instead, I sought to consider the wide-array of factors in these

students' lives that worked together to support their success. In order to properly analyze these different aspects of students' lives, research question one was broken into the following three sub-questions: *1) In what ways are students' academic success and future aspirations shaped by how they make meaning of what it means to "be" Lakota and the salience of that identity in their lives?; 2) In what ways are students' academic success and future aspirations shaped by the micro- (e.g., interactions with teachers, peers, and parents) and macro-level social factors (e.g., culture, values, opportunity) within their environment?;* and *3) What is the role of the school in shaping and supporting students' academic success and post-secondary aspirations?* Through these questions, I sought to understand the multitude of factors supporting students' success and post-secondary aspirations.

This emphasis on the array of factors supporting students' success is of particular note given the fact that there are very few studies of Native American student achievement that have sought to systematically examine the influence of students' experiences both inside and outside of school, and there are none to my knowledge have examined these factors in tandem with the Lakota. Consequently, by interviewing students about the cultural, social, and institutional factors supporting their success, I hoped to capture a more holistic perspective of these students' experiences than has been offered in the research literature.

In my second research question, "How do the factors that support students' achievement and aspirations vary across schooling contexts?" I sought to delve further into the role that schools played in shaping students' success. This further investigation of the role of the school in shaping students' success was not intended to suggest that students' experiences in school are more important to understanding their academic success than the other factors considered in research question one. Instead, this emphasis on the role of the school was intended to leverage

the analytical opportunities that existed as a consequence of my decision to interview students at three different schools. While I was uncertain how similar these students' experiences would be outside of school, I assumed that within each school there would be a high-degree of similarity in terms of students' educational experiences. Consequently, by utilizing the school as a unit of analysis, I hoped to understand whether students' experiences at these three schools differed, and if so, I wanted to know how these variations shaped students' success and post-secondary aspirations.

In order to address the research questions guiding this study, I interviewed 42 high-achieving junior and senior Lakota students at three different high schools, all within the same reservation. The students at these schools were interviewed about their perceptions of the reservation, their Lakota identity, their perceptions of racism and discrimination, their social support systems, and their experiences within their respective school. Through these interviews, I hoped to develop a more complete understanding of the factors that supported these students' academic success and post-secondary aspirations.

Definition of Terms

The terms culture, identity, and cultural identity will be used throughout this paper, and are often used very loosely in the educational research literature. At times, these words are treated as synonyms, while at other times they have very distinct definitions. In order to provide clarity as to how I intend these terms to be used in this study, I will offer my own understanding of each of these terms.

Culture, as used in this paper, refers to the shared knowledge, behaviors, beliefs, material objects, and cognitive frames of meaning that are learned as a member of a group (Bain, 2013).

While this definition allows for the possibility that individuals can be a member of an undefined number of cultures, most discussions of culture focus on the knowledge that is learned via membership in broad, socially constructed, groups, such as gender, social class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

While this definition of culture is not particularly novel, its use is not without problems (Bergey & Kaplan, 2010; Cohen, 2009). Many of these socially constructed groupings have somewhat fuzzy definitions for inclusion, and within a group, members have a wide range of individual experiences. In some ways, the heterogeneity of individual experiences becomes masked by the placement of individuals into one socially constructed category (Bergey & Kaplan, 2010; Cohen, 2009). On the other hand, there is value in recognizing the fact that many individuals within these socially constructed groups share many of the same experiences, a fact that can work to create shared cognitive frames of meaning (Bergey & Kaplan, 2010; Bain, 2013; Cohen, 2009).

In taking into account both sides of this argument, my use of the term culture will focus specifically on individuals' membership in one particular ethnic group, the Lakota. While students in this study varied widely in the extent to which aspects of their culture were emphasized at home, all students were growing up in a community where the political history of the tribe had shaped individuals' lives in similar ways and where aspects of the Lakota culture were present throughout the community. Thus, despite my recognition of the heterogeneity of the experiences of individuals within this reservation, my use of the term culture will focus broadly around the knowledge, behaviors, shared beliefs, and cognitive frames of meaning that individuals have learned as a result of being a member of the Lakota tribe and living on the

Davenport Indian Reservation (pseudonym), factors that I anticipated were central to how students thought about what it meant to be Lakota.

The second term, identity, refers to how individuals see themselves. An individual can possess multiple identities, some of which are more or less salient depending on their particular context. While humanists treat the concept of identity as separate from that of culture, and emphasize the individual's agency in constructing their identity (Varela, 2009), post-structuralists emphasize the way an individual's identity is a construction of their lived experience (Strega, 2005). While post-structuralists often use the term "subjectivity" to describe the ways that an individual's identity is shaped by the multitude of factors in the world around them, given my focus on the way that an individual's identity is shaped by their culture, I will utilize the term "cultural identity."

While all participants in this study were members of the Lakota tribe, they varied in the extent to which "being Lakota" had been central to their upbringing, how it had shaped their experiences, and how salient it was to their identity. Thus, my use of the term cultural identity is intended to acknowledge the variability in students' connectedness to "being" Lakota and the meaning, attributions, practices, and experiences they associated with being a member of the Lakota tribe.[3]

Contributions to the Field

Given my review of the literature, it is my belief that this study makes four important contributions to the field of Native American educational research. First, in taking note of the problems with treating Native Americans as though they share a pan-ethnic identity (O'Connor

[3] Given this emphasis on the relationship between students' Lakota culture and their identity, the term "Lakota identity" will be used interchangeably with the term "cultural identity."

et al., 2009), this study recognizes the diversity in experiences that exist between tribes, and consequently focuses specifically on the Lakota tribe.

In addition to having their own cultural beliefs, practices, and history with oppression, the Davenport Indian Reservation has economic challenges that are extreme among Native American tribes, including some of the highest rates of unemployment, poverty, and extreme poverty of any Native American reservation in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). I say this not to dwell on the problems that the Lakota face, but rather to emphasize the uniqueness of both the cultural and economic context within which the Lakota live. If, as the literature suggests (Cummins, 1986; Ogbu, 1987), the specific cultural and economic conditions of the Lakota impact how students make sense of the world around them, it would call into question attempts made at generalizing the findings of other Native American tribes to the Lakota. Hence, studying the Lakota specifically is an important step in understanding how aspects of cultural identity and economic opportunity work to shape the schooling experiences of Lakota students.

Second, this study makes an important contribution to the field by allowing Lakota students to tell their own stories (Franzak, 2006). Many studies of Native Americans' educational experiences rely on answers to surveys, statistical analyses of the impact of curricular changes, classroom observations, and interviews with teachers and administrators. While these types of studies provide valuable information in their own right, they fail to capture how students are understanding and making sense of their world, both inside and outside of school. By interviewing Lakota youth, I hoped to gain a clearer understanding of how Lakota students made sense of issues of education, cultural identity, culturally responsive pedagogy, discrimination, opportunity, and the challenges that exist in navigating the multiple cultural worlds in which they live.

I was fortunate enough to learn first-hand that this opportunity for a voice was not just something that researchers believe to be important, but that it does in fact matter to students. As the senior class president at one of the schools stated during my presentation to the school board, "I think it is cool to be able to have the opportunity to tell what we think, because we always have adults saying what is going on with us." As this statement makes apparent, these students valued being a part of the research process, not just being the outcome that was written about. I am hopeful that the interview process and subsequent member-checking ended up being as empowering of an experience for her as she expected it to be when she spoke in favor of my study.

Third, this study recognizes the multiplicity of factors that impact the educational experiences of Lakota students. Rather than attempting to explain the academic experiences of students by focusing on a singular aspect of their learning environment, as has traditionally been the case, this study examines the array of factors that influence the educational experiences of Lakota youth. Very few studies of Native American student achievement have sought to systematically examine the influence of students' experiences both inside and outside of school in shaping students' success, and none to my knowledge have explicitly examined these factors in tandem with the Lakota. By utilizing an analytical framework that recognizes the wide array of factors that influence an individual's academic resilience, I believe I have created a more complete picture of the educational experiences of high-achieving Lakota students.

Finally, while studies of the educational experiences of Lakota students are lacking, studies of successful Lakota students are even more so. This seems problematic, as it would be hoped that as much can be learned from the successes of students as from their failures. I am hopeful that my focus on high-achieving students can begin to shift the discourse towards a more

positive and complete understanding of the educational experiences of Native American students.

Outline of Dissertation

In my effort to examine the educational experiences of these academically resilient Lakota students, I have organized this dissertation into nine chapters. In Chapter Two, I will discuss the history of the Lakota people and offer some considerations as to the ways these historical experiences have influenced the academic experiences of students in this study. In Chapter Three, I will present an overview of the concept of resilience, paying particular attention to how this concept has been taken up in the research involving Native American students. In Chapter Four, I will discuss my methods of data collection and analysis, as well as offer considerations about my positioning as a white researcher. In Chapter Five, I will examine the similarities and differences in students' aspirations, as well as compare their experiences outside of school. In Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, I will present my findings of students' experiences at each of the three schools in this study, offering considerations as to the ways these schools have supported students' academic achievement and shaped their post-secondary aspirations. Finally, in Chapter Nine, I will examine my findings in light of the research questions guiding this study. I will offer considerations regarding the academic resilience of these students, discuss how students' experiences varied by school, and consider whether these experiences had any implications on students' post-secondary aspirations. Following this analysis, I will discuss the limitations of this study, future directions for research, and I will offer some concluding thoughts on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER II

Historical Perspectives

In order to properly contextualize the social milieu in which the Lakota experience education, it is necessary to first take a step back and examine the historical relationship between Native Americans and the United States government around the issue of education. In the words of Lomawaima and McCarty (2002), "The history of American Indian education can rightfully be conceptualized as a grand experiment in standardization" (p. 282).

Prior to colonization, Native American tribes were spread throughout America, successfully sustaining lifestyles that supported the needs of their tribes. The youth of these tribes would learn skills of survival, hunting, religion, and living in harmony with the land. Their teachers were often tribal elders, medicine men, and their extended family (Urban & Wagoner, Jr., 2004). While the ways in which tribes developed their youth varied, there was always some form of education given to the youth of the tribe (Urban & Wagoner, Jr., 2004).

As European Americans began to encroach on the land of the Native Americans, the settlers insisted on a new form of education, one that "educated" and "civilized" the Native American tribes they encountered (Urban & Wagoner Jr., 2004). The earliest efforts at inculcating the Native Americans with this Anglo-centric view of what it meant to be civilized came in the form of mission schools established by Roman Catholics in the middle of the 16th century. The primary aim of these schools was to convert Native Americans to Christianity. Very little emphasis in these schools was placed on academic learning. Similar efforts to convert

Native Americans to Christianity were undertaken in the years that followed by the Protestants, Baptists, Quakers, and Mormons (EchoHawk, 1997).

In 1819, as the continued expansion of the westward frontier came into increasing contact with Native Americans, the United States government passed the "Civilization Fund Act," an act that placed the federal government, and the soon to be created Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), at the center of efforts to assimilate the Native Americans.

> "That for the purpose of providing against the further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes, adjoining the frontier settlements of the United States, and for introducing among us the habits and arts of civilization, the President of the United States shall be, and he is hereby authorized, in every case where he shall judge improvement in the habits and condition of such Indians practicable, and that the means of instruction can be introduced with their own consent, to employ capable persons of good moral character, to instruct them in the mode of agriculture suited to their situation; and for teaching their children in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and performing such other duties as may be enjoined, according to such instructions and rules as the President may give and prescribe for the regulation of their conduct, in the discharge of their duties." (Prucha, 2000)

One aspect of this effort to "Americanize" the Native Americans came in the form of boarding schools. While boarding schools existed both on and off the reservation, the off-reservation boarding schools became much preferred by the general public, as many Americans feared that on-reservation boarding schools would allow students to remain too close to their culture (Urban & Wagoner, Jr., 2004). This effort to remove and eliminate the culture of Native Americans shaped the overarching goal of the off-reservation boarding schools. Richard Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, the first off-reservation boarding school, described the purpose of the school as follows:

> "A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with this sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Pratt, 1892).

In order to "kill the Indian in him," these schools would remove all aspects of the students' Native American culture. This would mean the cutting of hair, an insistence of

European American styles of dress, the exclusion of all languages besides English, and a ban on Native American religious practices (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Urban & Wagoner Jr., 2004). The presence of OIA run boarding schools flourished in the early 1900's, spreading throughout the country (Riney, 1999). However, not long after, the practices of these boarding schools came into question. A 1928 report, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, (more commonly known as the *Meriam Report*) commissioned by the Secretary of the Interior, determined that this Eurocentric, assimilationist approach to Native American education was simply not working. The report noted that many Native Americans simply had no interest in learning European American culture, and consequently recommended against forcing Native Americans to become something they did not want to be (Meriam, 1928).

> "The position, taken, therefore, is that the work with and for the Indians must give consideration to the desires of the individual Indians. He who wishes to merge into the social and economic life of the prevailing civilization of this country should be given all practicable aid and advice in making the necessary adjustments. He who wants to remain an Indian and live according to his culture should be aided in doing so." (Meriam, 1928, p. 88)

In response to this report, the OIA began making changes to the ways in which these schools operated. Efforts were made to respect the culture of Native Americans within the schools (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). For example, bilingualism was promoted in some schools, and texts were developed that sought to portray local Native American tribes in positive ways. However, these efforts were marked by a constant push-and-pull in terms of just how much tribal sovereignty and Native American culture would be accepted. For instance, although textbooks were redesigned to portray Native Americans in a more positive light, they often depicted Native Americans in ways that furthered the federal government's goal of assimilation, such as depicting the "good" Native Americans as the ones who did as they were told (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). Thus, the relationship between Native Americans and the OIA

schools, while improving, had not yet reached the level of self-determination that the 1928 report had called for.

In 1970, the relationship between Native Americans and the United States educational system took another positive step forward. Richard Nixon, in his "Special Message to Congress on Indian Affairs," declared the importance of allowing self-determination to Native Americans and turning the direction of schools over to tribes, if they so desired (Nixon, 1970). This call for greater self-determination resulted in the "Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975," an act that allowed tribes the opportunity to have increased control over their schools, while still retaining federal funding.

By 1978, there were 34 schools controlled by local Native American communities. For a brief time period, these schools were wonderful examples of success, often producing higher achievement outcomes than other schools within their respective states (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). The success of these schools strengthened the belief of many Native American educators that schools that were culturally connected to their students could produce positive outcomes for their students. Unfortunately, these positive experiences were short-lived due to the uncertain and often changing relationship that existed between the OIA, which had been renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and local schools. One of the largest sources of this uncertainty came as a result of the challenges that schools faced in being dependent on the BIA's dispersal of federal funds, a funding source that was neither timely nor predictable. Many schools reported being unclear of what their budget was going to be for the coming year, unsure which programs could be kept, and unsure how many teachers could be afforded (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002).

In the late 1980's, the "Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Act" authorized a plan to ameliorate the uncertainty regarding funding for students. However, in order to be eligible under this more predictable finance system, the schools had to agree to meet certain accreditation standards, standards that would be set at the regional and national level, as opposed to the local level (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). In essence, in order to be eligible for this more predictable federal funding, schools had to move away from the success that had been found in the culturally connected schooling model and towards a system defined by learning goals that had been set by groups with no connection or concern for the learning of Native American students. The self-determination promised by President Nixon was quickly compromised by the federal government's attachment of money to the meeting of learning standards that were poorly aligned with the aims of the tribes.

This brings us to today's educational context, a system in which many reservation schools remain controlled by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), a bureau housed within the BIA. The schools on the reservation continue to struggle to find a balance between meeting the goals of their local community and those set by the federal government. Given the schools' dependence on federal funding, these schools are forced to focus on meeting the demands of federal education initiatives that emphasize accountability and high-stakes testing (Bureau of Indian Education, 2012), a focus that is often in conflict with efforts to provide culturally relevant learning opportunities. This is an unfortunate shift given how successful these culturally relevant schools had been in many Native American communities just decades earlier (Castagano & Brayboy, 2008).

Whether it is due to a lack of cultural relevance, an over-emphasis on testing, or another explanation, many Native American schools are grappling with how to combat low graduation rates, high dropout rates, and a system that does not seem to adequately meet the needs of Native American students. This challenge becomes further complicated when one recognizes that while Native Americans share a general history of oppression within the United States, the history, experiences, and needs of each tribe varies greatly. Attempting to meet the educational needs of Native American students with a one-size-fits-all approach is likely to produce an approach to education that fits no tribe particularly well. Consequently, I now narrow my focus, and turn to a discussion of the history of the Lakota people.

Lakota History

While the educational experiences of Native American students share many commonalities, as all were members of a school system aimed at assimilating them into white society, the histories of each of these tribes are very different. While the discussion that follows is not intended to capture the complexities of the Lakota culture or their history, and admittedly runs the risk of oversimplification and forcing the culture and history of the Lakota people into a Western perspective (Anglas Grande, 2000), understanding the history of the community is imperative to understanding the experiences of the students in this study. As a member of the Bridgman school board told me, it is essential that I situate the experiences of these Lakota students within the historical experiences of the Lakota, as this history has profoundly shaped the Davenport Indian Reservation, the site of this study, and the experiences of today's students.

In an effort to properly contextualize students' educational experiences, I will utilize the next several pages to describe many of the significant historical events involving the Lakota,

paying particular attention to events involving the federal government, as these interactions were central to the creation of the Davenport Indian Reservation. Following this discussion, I will examine the ways that the historical trauma of these experiences continues to shape the community today.

While the oral history of the Lakota offers many possibilities about their origins, archaeological records suggest that the Sioux[4] entered into central Minnesota from the Mississippi Valley as early as 800 A.D. (Gibbon, 2003). During this time, the Sioux culture revolved around close, kin-based networks that were sustained through hunting, fishing, and gathering. As these networks grew larger, factions splintered off. Over time, this splintering resulted in the emergence of new dialects and the creation of new villages across Minnesota and the neighboring states. These factions would eventually evolve into distinct tribes, one of which was the Lakota (Gibbon, 2003).

By the 17th century, the faction that had become the Lakota occupied land near the Mississippi River in Minnesota. As the Iroquois war pushed French fur traders to the west, the Lakota were able to utilize their positioning near the Mississippi to establish a successful economy based on horticulture, fur trading, and hunting (Biolsi, 1998; Gibbon, 2003). However, by the middle of the 18th century, a number of factors pushed the Lakota into new land. Perhaps most important was the competition that existed among Native American tribes to engage in the rapidly expanding fur trading market. The well-armed Cree and Assiniboine tribes sought to take the Lakota's land and position themselves as middlemen in the fur trade market, a fact that pushed the Lakota out of their land in Minnesota (Biolsi, 1998; Ostler, 2004). Fortunately for the

[4] Use of the term Sioux refers to the collective Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations.

Lakota, the west became an attractive destination for them due to the rich opportunities to hunt buffalo, as well as the weakening of other tribes due to smallpox (Biolsi, 1998; Ostler, 2004).

After successfully establishing their tribe in the Northern Plains, the Lakota fought to maintain and expand their land holdings in the subsequent decades, doing battle with the Kiowas, Crows, Shoshones, Assiniboines, and Skiki Pawnees (Ostler, 2004). Following these battles, the Lakota were firmly entrenched in the Northern Plains of the United States. Unfortunately, they would not be alone for long.

As a result of the California Gold Rush of the 1840's, tens of thousands of settlers passed through the Northern Plains on their way to California, much of which was Lakota territory at the time. The result of this invasion was the killing of bison, the destroying of grass for grazing, and the removal of trees by European American settlers (Ostler, 2004). These settlers were competing for resources with the Lakota, encroaching on their land, and at times, their safety was put in danger by intertribal conflicts. In an effort to ensure the safe passage of white settlers, as well as to satiate the Native American tribes for the damage that had been done to their lands, the United States government, the Lakota, and a number of other tribes, signed into the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 (Ostler, 2004).

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 called for peace among the Northern Plains tribes, established tribal boundaries, ensured the safe passage of settlers heading west, and granted permission to the government to build roads and military forts within tribal boundaries. In return, the government promised $50,000 in food and goods for a period of 50 years to each tribe (Ostler, 2004). The treaty also required each tribe to choose a head-chief. For the Lakota, this role would be given to Sicangu Brave Bear (Biolsi, 1998). Despite the fact that only certain tribal

bands were represented at these negotiations, as well as serious questions that remain about whether the Lakota understood what they were signing into, the Lakota were reportedly satisfied with the terms of the agreement and the compensation they received for the damage to their land (Ostler, 2004).

In 1854, as members of a Sicangu Lakota camp awaited the arrival of their food and goods, an ox wandered into their camp. Assuming that the ox was a part of the soon to be delivered rations, the ox was shot and killed. Unbeknownst to the Sicangu Lakota was that the ox belonged to a Mormon immigrant in the area. The immigrant demanded compensation for the animal. Sicangu Brave Bear, the recently chosen head-chief, offered to pay for it, but for whatever reason, payment was refused. United States Lieutenant John Gratton, in an attempt to teach the Lakota a lesson, took 29 soldiers to the Sicangu camp to arrest the person who had killed the ox. However, the member of the tribe who had shot the ox refused to give himself up. Consequently, Lieutenant Gratton ordered his men to fire on the Sicangu Lakota. A few hundred Lakota warriors met this act of aggression with an immediate and violent response. All but one of Lieutenant Gratton's men were killed. However, in the battle, Sicangu Brave Bear was killed as well (Marshall III, 2007; Ostler, 2004). This would mark the beginning of a series of hostilities that would occur between the Lakota and the United States government in the latter half of the 19th century.

A year later, in retaliation for the killing of Lieutenant Gratton's men, General William Harney attacked the Sicangu Lakota, and their new leader, Little Thunder. Of the 250 Sicangu Lakota at the camp, 86 members of the tribe were killed, many of whom were women and children (Ostler, 2004). While the intent on the part of General Harney was reportedly to quell any desires that the Lakota may have had to fight against the government after their previous

success, according to Ostler (2004), this attack had quite the opposite effect. This attack by General Harney hardened the resolve of the Lakota people to fight the United States government. Over the course of the next decade, numerous armed conflicts would occur between the United States government and the Lakota, including Red Cloud's War that occurred from 1866 to 1868, a conflict settled by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty (Biolsi, 1998).

Besides ending Red Cloud's War, the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty established the area west of the Missouri River, bounded by what would become the South Dakota border, as the Great Sioux Reservation. The Lakota would also be allowed to continue hunting in parts of Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, and Kansas (Biolsi, 1998). In addition to establishing the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation, the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty allowed the federal government to establish OIA agencies around the reservation (Ostler, 2004). These agencies would be used to administer federal programs and encourage the Lakota people to take up farming, embrace Western moral values, and to adopt Western styles of dress. In other words, the OIA established government offices on the reservation that in large part would be used to push an agenda of assimilation on the Lakota (Biolsi, 1998).

Despite the fact that the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty established the western portion of South Dakota as the Great Sioux Reservation, Lieutenant George Custer was sent to the Black Hills of western South Dakota in the early 1870's to search for gold and to find land on which to establish a fort. In 1874, Lieutenant Custer wrote to federal officials about the opportunity for profitable mining in the Black Hills. Buoyed by these claims, prospectors became greatly interested in the opportunity to mine the Black Hills for gold (Olson, 1965).

In an effort to meet the demands of prospectors, the President authorized a commission to negotiate with the Lakota to lease the land. However, it was an effort that the Lakota rebuffed (Olson, 1965). Nevertheless, encroachment into the Black Hills seemed inevitable. While the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty called for protection of the Lakota's land by the United States government, by 1876, there were 4,000 illegal inhabitants in the Black Hills (Ostler, 2004).

In an effort to provoke a war with the Lakota, so as to allow the government to avoid the negotiation process and to open up the Black Hills for development, the government ordered all Lakota to their local agencies and called for those utilizing off-reservation land to return to the reservation (Ostler, 2004). When many of the Lakota failed to report, the Secretary of War deemed them hostile to the United States and authorized the use of military force. The resulting war came to be known as the Great Sioux War of 1876. The Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho fought together against the United States government in a series of battles that resulted in significant losses to both the Native Americans and the United States (Marshall III, 2007).

Following the Battle of the Little Big Horn, in which Native American forces, led by Chief Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, defeated General George Custer's 700-man Battalion, the United States significantly increased the number of troops sent to fight against the Native Americans. Shortly after, the various tribes began to surrender, and were forced to accept the government's provisions for their land (Biolsi, 1998). The culmination of these negotiations was an 1877 agreement that gave the right of occupation of the Black Hills to the federal government.

Further efforts by the federal government to acquire the land of the Lakota people occurred in 1889, when Congress passed "The Great Sioux Agreement." This agreement broke the Great Sioux Reservation into six smaller reservations: Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Lower

Brule, Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Standing Rock. The remaining land not encompassed by these reservations (11,000,000 acres) was opened for development to the United States public (Biolsi, 1998). While the Lakota had once ruled the plains of South Dakota, the federal government had now taken the majority of their land and placed them onto reservations where the OIA would work to assimilate them into white society.

Though the government fought to weaken the Lakota through battles and the taking of their land, these battles did not succeed in taking their pride or their cultural identity, a fact that many whites felt threatened by. This fear of Lakota cultural practices was not without consequences for the Lakota, a fact that will become apparent through a brief discussion of Ghost Dance and its relationship with the Massacre at Wounded Knee.

While the spiritual beliefs of the Lakota are outside the scope of this paper, one that was emerging during the late 1800's was Ghost Dance. Ghost Dance was based on the belief that Wovoka, a medicine man from the Northern Paiute tribe, was the Messiah, and that he would one day wipe European Americans from their land. The Ghost Dance called for a special form of ceremonial dancing in order to call to their Father in hopes of bringing about this destruction (Ostler, 2004). The Ghost Dance, and the resulting "Messiah Craze" that brought together many Lakota, became a point of concern to the federal agents on the reservation. Concerned that Ghost Dancers were preparing to wage battle against the government, the government sought to force the abandonment of Ghost Dances, an effort that culminated in the Army rounding up Ghost Dancers and Chief Sitting Bull (Ostler, 2004).

As tribal officers sought to arrest Sitting Bull, one of his supporters shot the arresting officer (Cox Richardson, 2010). What followed was an exchange of bullets that left Sitting Bull

dead and members of his tribal band fleeing to join Chief Big Foot's band (Ostler, 2004). Two weeks later, the Army encircled and attempted to disarm Chief Big Foot's band, which had set up camp at Wounded Knee Creek. During this disarmament, one of the members of the tribe refused to give up his gun, as he felt he had done nothing wrong. As the Army soldiers struggled with him for the gun, it went off (Cox Richardson, 2010). What followed was a barrage of gun fire that left nearly 300 Lakota men, women, and children dead, many of whom were placed into a mass grave (Marshall III, 2007). This event, which has come to be known as the Massacre at Wounded Knee, was extremely traumatic for the Lakota. Hundreds of men, women, and children had been killed by the United States government. However, its importance would not be forgotten, as it would serve an important symbolic role in a standoff that would occur almost a century later.

The time between the 1890's and 1930's, while far less physically violent, was perhaps even more culturally oppressive. The government outlawed traditional forms of gambling, dances were limited both in frequency and in who could participate, and children were sent to boarding schools (Marshall III, 2007). Full on efforts towards assimilation by the government and the OIA were in place. However, following the 1928 *Meriam Report*, the federal government began to reverse course on its policies towards Native Americans.

In 1934, Congress passed the "Indian Reorganization Act." Among other things, this act sought to place ownership of reservation land into tribal hands rather than individual hands and to create tribal councils that would fall under the supervision of the OIA (Rusco, 2000; Kelly, 1990). In the words of Philp (1985), the Indian Reorganization Act "offered the Indians a tribal alternative to assimilation" (p. 177). While it was up to each tribe to determine whether they

wanted to accept the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act, the voters on the Davenport Indian Reservation voted in favor of the act in 1934 (Lakota, 2015[5]).

While the majority of the voters accepted the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act, the policies of the act were controversial among the Lakota for two reasons. First, many individuals had been successfully utilizing their land and did not want to turn it over to the tribe. To take land away from individuals and return it to the tribe was in contrast to the notions of personal property and land policy that had been in place for the previous half century as a result of the Dawes Act in 1887, a federal policy that took reservation land from tribal holding, and broke it into individual allotments to be distributed among tribal members (Reinhardt, 2007). Second, many communities already had their own form of governance. The creation of tribal councils was seen by some as an attempt to replace traditional forms of self-governance with the culture of European Americans (Reinhardt, 2007).

In order to contextualize the tensions that would arise around the legitimacy of the early tribal councils, it is important to note that during the attempted conquest of the Lakota, numerous white men had children with Lakota women, children of whom were classified as mixed-bloods. As the tribal councils became established, the mixed-blood Lakota often held a higher proportion of the tribal council seats than did the full-blood Lakota, as well as held the more prominent positions. In response to this situation, the full-blood Lakota complained that the mixed-bloods were disproportionately benefitting from the Indian Reorganization Act and questioned their status as real Indians. These claims weakened the legitimacy of early tribal councils, a fact that bothered many of the mixed-blood Lakota (Biolsi, 1992; Reinhardt, 2007).

[5] This citation has been renamed, as it included identifying information about the location of the study. This citation will be used herein as a substitute for any sources that may contain identifying information about the location of the study.

While the implications of the rising tensions between the full-blood and mixed-blood Lakota will be discussed shortly, it is necessary to first discuss the ways that World War II shaped the experiences of Native Americans in the United States. As a consequence of the United States' entrance into World War II, over 40,000 Native Americans left their reservations and moved to urban areas in search of the economic opportunities available in war-time industries (Philp, 1985). These individuals found tremendous success during this time. They earned money, learned new skills, and acclimated to urban life (Philp, 1985). Bolstered by the success of these individuals, as well as the government's desire to reduce the money they put towards social programs, the government introduced the Voluntary Relocation Program (Philp, 1985). This program would move Native Americans from reservations around the country to large urban areas, such as Minneapolis, Chicago, and Los Angeles, where they would seek economic opportunities.

In the early years of the program, the Voluntary Relocation Program was quite popular. The program offered Native Americans the chance to have the economic prosperity that was not available to them on the reservation and it afforded individuals the opportunity to escape the changes that had occurred as a result of the Indian Reorganization Act, changes that "encouraged segregation, established puppet tribal governments under federal control, and violated their constitutional right of private property by imposing restrictions on land allotments and new land purchased for tribes" (Philp, 1985, p. 177).

While the Voluntary Relocation Program did have some success, it faced a number of shortcomings. While many Native Americans had moved away from the reservations for better economic opportunities and housing, many found themselves in rundown apartments where they were being charged excessive rent (Philp, 1985). Additionally, the economic opportunities of the

program proved fleeting. The economic recession of the 1950's limited both the quality and quantity of jobs available to Native Americans. For example, in St. Louis, 42% of the Native Americans who had relocated had to return to their reservation as a result of a lack of jobs (Philp, 1985). The success of the program was also hampered by the fact that many Native Americans were not able to receive the social services they needed in their new city, a fact that hampered their ability to adjust to urban life (Philp, 1985). As a result of these shortcomings, many Native Americans returned to the reservation.

For the Lakota, between one-third and one-half of those who participated in the Voluntary Relocation Program returned to the reservation (Marshall III, 2007). For residents on the reservation, the poor economic conditions continued to exist, but they had their way of life and government assistance from the BIA. Members of the Lakota tribe living off the reservation were struggling to make it economically in urban areas, but were also lacking the support of the BIA and Indian Health Services, a fact the made the reservation a better alternative for many individuals (Marshall III, 2007).

One unintended consequence of the Voluntary Relocation Program was the development of activism among urban Native Americans. These individuals, frustrated by the government's lack of services available to them in their new cities, as well as the lack of response by civic leaders to complaints about police brutality, demanded social change for Native Americans. It was out of these concerns that the American Indian Movement was born (Reinhardt, 2007).

The American Indian Movement was not specific to the Lakota tribe; there were 79 local American Indian Movement chapters and over 5,000 members (Reinhardt, 2007). Nevertheless, there was an important connection to the Lakota tribe. One of its founders, Russell Means, was a

member of the Oglala Lakota tribe. The American Indian Movement stressed the importance of fighting discrimination and of the recognition of a connection among all Native Americans in order to resist European American domination (Reinhardt, 2007). This philosophy appealed to many of the Lakota, particularly the full-bloods.

Support for the American Indian Movement was not uniform among the Lakota however. The tribal chairman at the time, a mixed-blood Lakota named Dick Wilson, took an extremely anti-American Indian Movement stance, going as far as to persecute supporters of the American Indian movement and to ban them from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (Marshall III, 2007; Matthiessen, 1992).

Though banned from Pine Ridge, the American Indian Movement continued to be active in South Dakota. The early forms of activism in South Dakota took place primarily in Rapid City, generally in the form of boycotts and the picketing of stores. Signs were hung that read, "Welcome to the most racist state in the U.S.A.!" (Reinhardt, 2007). While these efforts caught the attention of many, they did not receive the national attention that would soon befall them.

In 1973, members of the Oglala Lakota Tribe, many of whom were full-blood, tried to impeach Chairman Wilson on the grounds of nepotism and corruption within the BIA. The effort to impeach Chairman Wilson failed. In response, Means and other members of the American Indian Movement went to Pine Ridge and met with the group who had sought Chairman Wilson's impeachment. After organizing a protest, the group traveled from Pine Ridge to the village of Wounded Knee, the site of the 1890 massacre. Members of the American Indian Movement blocked the roads into town, stole rations from the village store, and took white members of the village hostage (Marshall III, 2007).

The standoff that resulted between the protestors and federal authorities lasted 73 days and became known as the Wounded Knee Incident. Gunfire between the protestors and the federal government was frequent, with one FBI agent and two members of the protest being killed. The U.S. Marshalls fired over 500,000 rounds of ammunition at the protestors and 200 protestors were arrested (Reinhardt, 2007; Marshall III, 2007).

Following the Wounded Knee Incident, Chairman Wilson, backed by the FBI and the BIA, engaged in what has been referred to as a "reign of terror" (Matthiessen, 1992, p. 337). During this time, Pine Ridge had the highest violent crime rate of any city in the United States (Matthiessen, 1992)."Nearly one hundred people, most of them AIM members or traditionals, were victims of unsolved murders or "accidents" during his terms in office" (p. 221). These unsolved murders and "accidents" were often the work of Chairman Wilson's paramilitary group, "Guardians of the Oglala Nation." Making matters worse, the tribal police, judges, and FBI permitted the actions of Wilson and the Guardians of the Oglala Nation, if not altogether supported them (Matthiessen, 1992).

This reign of terror came to an end with Dick Wilson's defeat in the 1976 election for tribal chairman. Nevertheless, these events had shaped the reservations of South Dakota in significant ways and had engendered a new generation of "Indian Fighters" in South Dakota. Bill Janklow, one of these self-described "Indian Fighters" (Matthiessen, 1992, p. 189), and a man who would go on to become the governor of South Dakota, was quoted as saying "The only way to deal with the Indian problem in South Dakota is to put a gun to the AIM leaders' heads and pull the trigger" (Cook-Lynn, 1996, p. 153). From the perspective of Cook-Lynn (1996), Janklow gave a voice to the racist sentiments of a large portion of South Dakota.

These events of the 1970's are noteworthy to this study for two reasons. First, these incidents illustrate the fact that government supported violence and racism against at least some members of the tribe was occurring less than 40 years ago. These incidents are more than memories of the past, they are experiences that many of today's members of the tribe lived through and have had their lives shaped by. This fact has undoubtedly shaped the lives and perspectives of students in this study. Second, it is important to recognize the historical importance of these events for Native Americans as a whole. These efforts drew national attention to the American Indian Movement and to the issues with which Native American communities were dealing. In the words of Joseph Marshall III (2007) "If its destiny was to focus public attention on issues of deep concern to native people all over the country, AIM has certainly fulfilled it" (p. 216).

Unfortunately, despite the increased attention to the concerns of the Native American communities that came as a result of the actions of the American Indian Movement, very little long-term change was made. Today, the list of concerns on the reservations of South Dakota remains much the same as they were in the 1970's, with concerns over health care, education, poverty, alcoholism, and access to quality housing.

The concerns raised by the American Indian Movement are particularly prevalent on the Davenport Indian reservation, the site of my proposed study. At the time of this study, the per capita income on the Davenport Indian Reservation was just over $6,000 per person, and the unemployment rate was over 80%. One in four children were born with fetal alcohol syndrome, over half of adults over the age of 40 had diabetes, the infant mortality rate was 300% higher than the national average, and the average life expectancy was between 45 and 52 years (Lakota, 2015). Educationally, the dropout and graduation rates were significantly worse than the national

averages presented earlier. For example, the graduation rate at Aspen High School, one of the data collection sites for this study, was less than 30% in the 2009-2010 school year and the dropout rate was over 20% (Bureau of Indian Education, 2011b). This is in comparison to a national graduation rate for Native Americans of approximately 67% (Stetser & Stilwell, 2014) and a national dropout rate of 12.4% (Aud et al., 2012). As will become apparent in my empirical chapters, these are challenges that the community and students I spoke with took quite seriously, and I met a number of individuals committed to seeing these conditions improve.

In addition to working to improve the health, economic, and educational opportunities on the reservation, members of the Lakota tribe continue to fight to maintain their sovereignty and their land. In 2007, the Lakota Freedom Delegation, a group led by Russell Means, issued a demand to the Department of State that they return the land that was taken from the Lakota, issued notice that they were withdrawing from treaties forced on them by the United States government, and demanded the recognition of their sovereignty (Rowland, Martin Sr., Means, & Young, 2009). While this effort was not an officially sanctioned tribal request, and was ultimately not recognized by the Department of State, it again highlights the contentious relationship that exists between some members of the Lakota tribe and the United States government. Just one year later, Means lost his bid for election as Oglala Lakota Tribal President by less than 300 votes (Bell Gease, 2008), a fact that likely indicates that Means was not on the fringe of Lakota politics and that many within the tribe share these views.

A final example of the efforts on the part of the Lakota to retain their land can be seen through the controversy that occurred in 2012 over the sale of privately held land in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The site, referred to as Pe' Sla by the Lakota, is a sacred religious site in the Black Hills that was taken by the federal government in 1877. Owners of the land asked $9

million dollars for it, an amount that outraged the Lakota, as they felt the land was taken illegally in the first place. The controversy received so much attention that a special report was presented on it at a United Nations meeting, a report supporting the position of the Lakota people (Anaya, 2012). Through the work of various tribal bands, the Lakota were able to raise the $9 million to buy back the land that was taken from them. Although this effort culminated in a satisfactory ending, it again illustrates the way that many of the current challenges that the Lakota face are situated within an historical context of oppression and unequal treatment by the United States government.

While some of the history presented in this section may seem far removed from my focus on education, a number of researchers have utilized a historical trauma perspective to suggest that these historical experiences are still very central to the daily lives of Native Americans (Brave Heart, 2000; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Denham, 2008; Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004). The term "historical trauma" has been defined by Evans-Campbell (2008) as, "the legacy of numerous traumatic events a community experiences over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events" (p. 320).

In order to conceptualize the effects of historical trauma, Evans-Campbell (2008) proposed a multi-level model in which historical trauma impacts individuals, families, and communities. At the individual-level, descendants of those who experienced trauma have been found to be more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and survivor's guilt, all of which may inhibit an individual's chances to be successful (Barocas & Barocas, 1980; Felsen, 1998; Brave Heart, 2000).

At the familial-level, the historical trauma associated with attending boarding schools has been suggested to be related to abuse and violence within the home (Giago, 1978). As these individuals grew up without the modeling of good parenting, they may have struggles of their own raising children. Other researchers have reported that descendants of survivors of trauma may be more likely to internalize their problems, so as to not burden their loved ones who have experienced trauma of their own (Walters, Evans-Campbell, Simoni, Ronquillo, & Bhuyan, 2006).

Finally, at the community-level, historical trauma has been suggested to impact Native American communities as a result of the generations of youth who have been stripped of their culture and can no longer pass on their traditional ways (Adams, 1995; Evans-Campbell, 2008). The result of this stripping away of culture has been a weakening of the social structure on reservations and an increased rate of negative behaviors, including suicide and alcoholism (Duran & Duran, 1995; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

For the Lakota, historical trauma stems from experiences such as the Massacre at Wounded Knee, the assimilationist policies of the federal government, and the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that characterized the boarding school era.

In an effort to understand the impact of these historical experiences, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart has conducted a number of studies with members of the Lakota tribe (Brave Heart, 1998; 1999a,b; 2000; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). In her studies, Brave Heart and her colleagues have consistently demonstrated that historical trauma shapes the experiences of members of the Lakota tribe in significant ways (Brave Heart, 1998; 1999a,b; 2000; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998).

Of particular note for this study, Brave Heart (2000) found that the impact of historical trauma extends to highly successful individuals within the community. Despite the fact that many of these individuals were in leadership roles and were seen as exemplary members of the community, they were affected by historical trauma in significant ways. The following excerpt from Brave Heart's study (2000) captures the way historical trauma impacted these individuals.

> "The kids that I work with are really angry at the Creator for their pain, their abuse. "Where was your God when I was being hurt? Where was your God all the nights I was being raped?" We never realized that they [children] were given to two people, to be accepted and to love, and to guide them, to nurture them. We never realized it. If God didn't want us to have those kids to give them that love and guidance and nurturing we wouldn't have them, they wouldn't be with us ... All the kids that I work with want that from their parents, they want a house, they want to be assured, they want to hear those words ... They are hungry, they are starving for that ... they will take everything that's offered them ... [With my kids] it was foreign to me to do that, I mean, I didn't know what love was until I was 37 years old " (p. 261).

This individual's description captures not only the abuses that he saw in the children he worked with, but also the experiences of his own children, and the challenges he faced in being a father. He described the pain of children who grew up with abuse and who did not feel loved or nurtured. Without the modeling of good parenting, he believed that many parents within the community struggled to raise children themselves.

While most of this excerpt was focused on the ways that historical trauma impacted the children he worked with, this individual also noted the ways that historical trauma made it a challenge for him to provide the right environment for his own children. As he stated, "it was foreign to me to do that…I didn't know what love was until I was 37 years old." The historical trauma related to boarding schools and cultural violence shaped not only his upbringing, but the upbringing of his children, and the upbringing of many of the children that he worked with. In these ways, the effects of historical trauma spanned generations and affected the community on a daily basis.

Despite the powerful example offered by this individual, not all members of the community ascribed to this perspective. In fact, at one of the school board meetings I attended, a board member proposed that they make a resolution to no longer blame historical trauma for the struggles they faced. From her perspective, the past was in the past, and they needed to start moving forward and saving their culture. However, a study by Whitbeck and colleagues (2009) would indicate that for many, the past is not just part of the the past. Whitbeck and colleagues (2009) found that among Native American parents in an upper Midwest tribe, 36.3% of parents thought about the loss of their language on a daily basis and 52% thought about the loss of their language on at least a weekly basis. Similarly, 33.7% of parents thought about the loss of their culture on a daily basis and 48.1% thought about the loss of their culture on at least a weekly basis. While these numbers do not speak directly to the presence of historical trauma, they do indicate that for members of this particular tribe, the thoughts of historical loss were not merely a remnant of the past, but were instead an active topic in the hearts and minds of individuals within the community.

When taken together, it seems likely that while the historical experiences of the Lakota impact individuals in different ways, on the whole, historical trauma continues to impact many individuals, families, and aspects of life on the reservation.

Conclusion

While parts of this chapter may appear far removed from students' experiences in schools, it is critical to situate these students' educational experiences within the historical context of the Lakota people. The lives of individuals on the Davenport Indian Reservation have been shaped in important ways by the historical trauma associated with the boarding school era,

the violent conflicts between the Lakota and the federal government, and the continuous efforts by the federal government to promote assimilation.

While not all students in this study felt affected by the past, or even acknowledged the concept of historical trauma, these historical experiences have likely shaped many of the individuals that they have come in contact with, families with whom they have interacted, and life on the reservation itself. Consequently, in order to accurately understand these students' educational experiences and the ways that their experiences were shaped by the world around them, it is critical that students' experiences are first situated within the context of the Davenport Indian Reservation and the history of the Lakota people.

Chapter III

Theoretical Perspectives

While the historical experiences of the Lakota have influenced students' lives in important ways, there are a number of factors beyond historical trauma that have shaped these students' responses to education, factors such as their experiences within the classroom and their belief in the value of education. In order to more fully understand students' academic resilience, it is necessary to take a closer look at the factors that work to either support or hinder their academic success. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the research literature that has examined the factors that shape students' academic resilience, paying particular attention to identifying the risk and protective factors in these students' environments.

Resilience

Originating in the field of psychopathology, early resilience researchers examined how some children thrive in the face of adversity and risk (Bleuler, 1978; Brown, Harris, & Bifulco, 1986; Garmezy, 1981). For example, Bleuler (1978) found that many children of schizophrenics exhibited pro-social behaviors, despite their increased genetic risk for schizophrenia, as well as growing up in a home environment that was less conducive to developing socially acceptable behaviors. Over time, efforts to understand resilience have been taken up in myriad areas, including suicide, substance abuse, and education (Condly, 2006; Meschke & Patterson, 2003; Roy, Sarchiapone, & Carli, 2007).

Given this widespread application of resilience, its conceptualization has taken on many forms. However, for the purposes of this study, I will be utilizing Rutter's (2006) definition of resilience. To Rutter, "resilience is an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences." (p. 2). As Rutter's definition makes clear, resilience is relative and cannot be measured alone. It is not an individual trait that acts consistently across exposure to a variety of risks. Resilience instead has to be inferred from the variations of individuals within the same group who are exposed to similar risk factors (Rutter, 1987).

Given this conceptualization of resilience, there are at least three factors necessary to analyzing resilience among a population: 1) Expected Outcome; 2) Risk; and 3) Protective Factors. In other words, in order to understand resilience, it is necessary to establish what the outcome is that represents an unexpectedly positive performance, what the risk factors are that would be expected to inhibit this outcome, and what allows individuals to respond positively, despite these risk factors.

Expected Outcome. In terms of the expected outcome that characterizes resilience, it has been conceptualized in the research literature in at least three different ways (Werner, 1995): 1) Recovery after a traumatic event (Beardslee, 1989); 2) Positive outcomes in the face of high levels of risk (Benard, 1995; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993); and 3) The maintenance of normative behaviors in the face of stress (Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt, & Target, 1994). As the research on resilience continues to evolve, the second characterization, "positive outcomes in the face of high levels of risk," appears to have become the predominant operationalization in the educational resilience literature, with many researchers examining students' academic success in

the face of potential barriers to their success (Bergstrom, Cleary, & Peacock, 2003; LaFromboise et al., 2006; Morales, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, I defined academic success as students' achievement of a 3.0 grade point average during their high school career. While this conceptualization of academic success was consistent with how academic success has frequently been operationalized in the research literature, this use of a normative definition of success ran the risk of attempting to fit the goals of the Lakota into a Eurocentric perspective on what constitutes success in school. However, based on my conversations with individuals in the community, including students, school board members, and administrators, this definition of educational success was consistent with the educational goals of the Lakota. These students held firm to the belief that earning high grades and doing well in school was a critical component of achieving the life they desired, and they were surrounded by people who strengthened and affirmed this belief.

While I have chosen to focus on students who have earned high grades during their school career, it is important to note that this conceptualization of resilience is not intended to negate the many other ways that students in this community demonstrate resilience. As Lafromboise and colleagues (2006) note:

> Resilience in the face of adversity is not new to American Indian tribes. They have survived genocidal practices directed toward them, including a massive redistribution of people away from their homelands and the imposition of the reservation system. They withstood drastic changes in sociopolitical, cultural, and physical environments and the added stress from oppression and hostility. Through it all, many were able to adapt and overcome adverse circumstances. (p. 194)

I have focused specifically on the academic achievement of students at one point in their academic career. Their positioning as resilient in this study does not necessarily mean that they will be resilient in college, nor does it mean that those students who were not included in this study are not resilient in a number of other ways. Resilience is not an enduring trait. It is context-

dependent and subjectively determined. Assuming anything about the resilience of individuals beyond this very specific measure of academic success requires an unwarranted leap in conclusions that is not supported by the data in this study.

Risk. Finn and Rock (1997) describe the concept of risk as follows, "Exposure to particular conditions, or risk factors, increases the likelihood that an individual will experience certain adverse consequences" (p. 221). In other words, risk is defined as the exposure to conditions that increase the chance of negative outcomes.

Due to the previously cited academic struggles of many Native American students (Aud et al., 2012; Bureau of Indian Education, 2012; Stetser & Stillwell, 2014), as well as the documented historical and contemporary risk factors that many Native American students face, Native American students have traditionally been conceptualized as at-risk for academic failure in the research literature (Blum, Harmon, Harris, Bergeisen, & Resnick, 1992; Brave Heart, 2000; LaFromboise et al., 2006; LaFromboise & Howard-Pitney, 1995; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2005). Given this fact, I entered this study with the assumption that these academically successful students were finding success in an environment that would have been expected to compromise their academic success.

In Chapter Two, I discussed the concept of historical trauma and the ways that the cultural and physical violence that the Lakota experienced has shaped the experiences of today's youth and placed their academic success at risk. However, in order to more fully understand the risk factors to Lakota students' success, as well as to begin to identify and understand the factors that supported these students' success, it is also important to consider the contemporary risk factors that Lakota students experience both inside and outside of school.

At the level of the school, the Cultural Discontinuity Framework (Cummins, 1986) has been frequently utilized to describe the risk to students' academic success that is posed by a lack of alignment between the culture the student has grown up in and the culture of the educational system. In Cummins' (1986) words, "The central tenet of the framework is that students from "dominated" societal groups are "empowered" or "disabled" as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools" (p. 21).

This disabling of ""dominated" societal groups" occurs in a multitude of ways, including when the curriculum is not relevant to students' lives, when the assessments used by teachers are not culturally appropriate, when teachers' expectations for students are culturally biased, and when the schools' goals for students are not in alignment with the community or students' goals for themselves. In essence, explanations of cultural discontinuity point towards the presence of barriers that students face in their schooling experience that prevent them from fully engaging with the educational process and achieving successful academic outcomes.

One area that has been particularly emphasized among researchers is the curriculum of the school. One of the most commonly cited examples of the importance of a culturally relevant curriculum comes from the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) in Hawaii (Tharp, 1982). KEEP originated in response to the difficulties that Hawaiian students were having relative to their white, Japanese, and Chinese peers. In an effort to ameliorate this problem, the KEEP program altered the K-3 reading curriculum to be more culturally sensitive (Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). More specifically, the curriculum shifted to an emphasis on comprehension instead of phonics, a move that allowed the Hawaiian students to tell stories in a way that was more aligned with their home culture. The KEEP program shifted the classroom emphasis towards group-work rather than individual assignments, and feedback was given in a

way that was more aligned with students' culture (i.e., indirect and toward the group). The result of these changes was significant reading improvement for Hawaiian children in the study (Vogt et al., 1987).

Building on the success of KEEP, an alliance was formed between KEEP and the Rough Rock Community School on the Navajo reservation. However, what the researchers quickly learned was that they could not simply replicate the program in a different cultural milieu (Vogt et al., 1987; Nieto, 2000). Students at the Rough Rock School struggled with the new curriculum and numerous adaptations were required. Students preferred holistic thinking to linear thinking, worked better in same-sex groups, and the teachers needed to use different ways to manage misbehavior (Vogt et al., 1987). The program would eventually find success under the name, "The Rough Rock English-Navajo Language Arts Program" (Lipka & McCarty, 1994). The fact that KEEP found success again at Rough Rock, though only after modifying it to fit the local culture, would seem to reaffirm the importance of connecting the cultural background of the students with the school curriculum.

In addition to the need to minimize the incongruence that often exists between the background of the students and the curriculum of the school, other researchers have drawn attention to the risk posed by the presence of teachers who do not understand the culture and backgrounds of the students they teach. In Philips' (1983) study of students on the Warm Springs Reservation, she found that there was a large gap between how teachers expected students to interact and the expectations that existed in students' homes.

Students in Philips' study (1983) often failed to respond positively to whole class, teacher-led instruction, which was the dominant teaching style on the Warm Springs

Reservation. When given the opportunity, students responded much more favorably to small-group work or one-on-one instruction from the teacher. Teachers often misread the lack of eye contact by students as disinterest. In reality, avoiding eye contact was an appropriate way of interacting in the Warm Springs culture, which viewed too much eye contact as indicating over-familiarity and intimidation. As a result of these differences in interactional patterns, the students on the Warm Springs Reservation had their educational opportunities hindered by their teachers' lack of knowledge about their culture.

While the Cultural Discontinuity Framework (Cummins, 1986) has allowed for a greater consideration of the ways that students' experiences within their respective school may inhibit their success, other researchers have emphasized students' experiences outside of school in order to understand the ways that broader, macro-social factors, may compromise students' academic success. One perspective that has been particularly utilized is John Ogbu's (1987) Cultural Ecological Theory. Ogbu's (1987) Cultural Ecological Theory was constructed around considerations of how macro-social factors affect how individuals from particular minority groups perceive the opportunity structure in America, and how this in turn works to shape their subsequent engagement with the educational process.

In its most rudimentary form, the Cultural Ecological Theory (Ogbu, 1987) suggests that Native Americans, and other minority groups who were brought into the United States against their will, do not buy into the idea of America as the land of opportunity and reject the idea that success in school is going to lead to the same economic opportunities as whites (Ogbu, 1987). These groups' rejection of education as a means for social mobility is due to their belief that the oppression and discrimination that they have experienced for generations is enduring. Consequently, they do not believe they will be afforded the same opportunities as whites, even if

they work just as hard in school. As a result, these students often develop academic dispositions that are counter to traditionally held forms of success in school, a fact that places their academic success at risk.

Paralleling the Cultural Ecological Theory's emphasis on students' perceptions of macro-social barriers and the ways these perceptions shape students' academic engagement (Ogbu, 1987), Peshkin (1997) found that many Pueblo students disengaged from the educational process as a result of their belief that the opportunities available to them on the reservation would be no different whether they earned their high school diploma or not. Consequently, many of the Pueblo students in Peshkin's study disengaged from the educational process, a fact that compromised students' academic success and led to many students dropping out of high school.

Given the fact that these students were living on one of the poorest reservations in the United States, in a state that was dubbed, "The most racist state in the U.S.A." (Reinhardt, 2007), the macro-social risk factors identified by both Ogbu (1987) and (Peshkin, 1997) posed a very real risk to students' academic success on the Davenport Indian Reservation. While the students in this study may not have been affected equally by the historical and contemporary risk factors described in this section, understanding the array of potential risk factors to students' success is imperative in order to begin to identify and understand the protective factors that supported their success.

Protective Factors. Protective factors are those factors that ameliorate the risk posed to an individual (Olsso, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2002). Growing out of the positive psychology movement, there has been a considerable effort to identify the protective factors that promote resiliency (Ungar, 2004). These efforts have focused on all levels of an

individual's world, including their family life, their peers, their support in school, the support they receive in the community, and their own dispositions (Garmezy, 1991; Lafromboise et al., 2006; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1995). Each of these factors has been suggested to work to help individuals overcome the risk factors that they encounter.

In terms of the studies that have sought to identify potential protective factors for Native American students, researchers have found a number of protective factors that work to support students' success. At the level of students and their families, a review of the research literature by Bingham and Ocagaki (2012) found that possessing a strong bicultural identity, having Native American peers who value education, and having high levels of parental engagement were all related to improved student achievement. Similar findings of the relationship between academic success and the development of a strong bicultural identity were found by Garrett and Pichette (2000), who reported that Native American students with a strong bicultural identity had the least trouble adapting to the non-native aspects of schooling.

Paralleling these researchers' emphasis on having a strong bicultural identity, Ward's (2005) study of Northern Cheyenne students found a positive relationship between students' connection to their cultural tradition and academic success. Similarly, studies of on-reservation Native Americans in the Upper Midwest by both LaFromboise and colleagues (2006), and Whitbeck and colleagues (2001) found that cultural identity and self-esteem were positively related to students' school success.

It is important to note though that not all studies have identified students' cultural identity as a protective factor. Stumblingbear-Riddle and Romans (2012) reported that enculturation had only a weak relationship with academic success for Native American students. These researchers found that social support from friends was the greatest factor supporting academic success for

reservation youth, though also significant was students' subjective well-being and the support they received from their families. Similarly, Whitesell, Mitchell, and Spicer (2009) found that self-esteem had the strongest relationship with academic success for students in four reservations located in the western US, while the effects of cultural identity were non-significant.

Given the fact that these studies examined students across a number of different tribes, it is to be expected that there would be some variation in the protective factors that support students' success. Nevertheless, these studies provide a useful starting point in considering the potential individual and family-level protective factors that promote academic resilience among Lakota students.

Beyond the individual and family-level protective factors that these studies have identified, other researchers have emphasized the ways that schools can act as protective factors in promoting students' academic success. For example, researchers have established the importance of incorporating culture into the curriculum for the Navajo (Lipka & McCarty, 1994), Mohawk (Agbo, 2001), Hualapai (Stiles, 1997), and Yu'Pik tribes (Barnhardt 1990; Barnhardt, 1999; Lipka & McCarty, 1994). As Demmert (2001) concluded in his literature review, "A substantial number of studies has shown that when local knowledge plays a dominant role in instruction (usually in combination with the use of the Native language), improvements are seen in various performance and attainment measures" (p. 19).

In addition to the ways in which students' success may be supported by a more culturally relevant curriculum, a number of researchers have considered the efforts of the teacher as a potential protective factor to students' success. One potential way that teachers may be able to improve the educational experiences of their students is through the inclusion of culturally relevant teaching practices. While the exact definition of culturally responsive pedagogy depends

on who is asked, to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally responsive pedagogy rests on three central tenets, "(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). To proponents of culturally relevant teaching practices, utilizing teaching practices that eliminate the cultural discontinuity that exists within the classroom is a critical component to the success of minority students.

Numerous researchers have echoed this call for the need for culturally competent teachers (Agbo, 2001; Castagano & Brayboy, 2008; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Dehyle, 1992; Demmert, Grissmer, & Towner, 2006; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1990, Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003; O'Connor et al., 2009; Sanders, 2013; Starnes, 2006; Tsatoke, 2012; Tyler et al., 2008). These researchers call for students to have teachers who are able to connect with the students, who are culturally sensitive, and who engage in pedagogical practices that support students' culture.

While there are no particular background characteristics necessary for being a culturally competent teacher, there are some specific pedagogical practices that have generally been found to be more effective with Native American students. Native American students generally place a greater emphasis on cooperation, visual learning, and the importance of family (Pewewardy, 2002; Tharp & Yamauchi, 1994). Consequently, teaching practices that allow for more cooperative learning (Demmert, 2001; Larimore, 2000), practices that emphasize local knowledge (Bennett, 1987), and discussion that allows for open-ended questioning (McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, & Benally, 1991) have all been found to lead to improved student learning. However, it is important to take these suggestions with caution. Attempts to generalize Native

American culture can lead to an overgeneralization of learning processes and a stereotypic understanding of particular cultural traits.

When looking across these areas of research, it is apparent that there are an array of factors that can work to support an individual's success. Given this fact, a number of researchers have advocated for an ecological approach to understanding the role of protective factors (Arrington & Wilson, 2000; Keogh & Weisner, 1993; Resnick & Burt, 1996). Much like the multi-leveled conceptualization of risk offered in the previous section, these researchers call for the need to develop models that recognize and seek to incorporate the multitude of factors in an individual's world that can act as protective factors in the face of risk. It is through this mutli-leveled conceptualization of risk and resilience that I have developed this study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have defined the three components necessary to understanding an individual's resilience: Expected Outcome, Risk, and Protective Factors. As my description of each of these categories has made clear, identifying the array of factors that shapes an individual's resilience can be quite challenging.

In terms of the expected outcome that defines resilience, the educational resilience literature has primarily focused on positive outcomes in the face of high levels of risk. For this study, the outcome that I was most interested in was students' academic success, which was defined by their attainment of a grade point average of at least a 3.0. While this conceptualization of academic success drew from normative definitions of academic success in the research literature, it is important to note that this conceptualization of academic success was consistent

with the ideals of success expressed to me by individuals throughout the reservation, and appeared to be a valid measure of academic success on the Davenport Indian Reservation.

A second component to understanding resilience is a consideration of the risks that may compromise an individual's success. As was previously noted, due to the academic struggles of many Native American students, as well as the documented historical and contemporary risk factors to their success, Native Americans have been a group that has traditionally been considered at-risk for academic failure. Consequently, I entered this study with the assumption that these academically successful students were finding success in an environment that many would have expected would compromise their academic success. The fact that these students were finding academic success, despite the presence of historical and contemporary risk factors, necessitated an investigation of the factors that worked to support their academic achievement.

The supports that work to help students overcome potential risk factors to their success are referred to as protective factors. Protective factors can exist in all aspects of an individual's world. Students' academic success may be supported by their cultural identity, by the support of their family and peers, and by factors within the school environment that work to support their success. Identifying the protective factors that supported students' success and future aspirations in the face of high levels of risk was a central goal of this study, and as will become apparent in Chapter Four, this goal significantly shaped my interview protocol and the conversations I had with these high-achieving Lakota students.

CHAPTER IV

Research Methods and Design

Given my conceptualization of risk and resilience, I sought to design my study in a way that would allow me to examine students' thinking about the factors, both inside and outside of school, which affected their success. As noted in Chapter Three, failing to recognize the array of factors that influence students' success may result in an oversimplified understanding of students' schooling experiences, a shortcoming that could potentially limit the validity of my results.

School and Community Context

In order to understand how high-achieving Lakota students were making sense of the multitude of influences on their learning, I spoke with juniors and seniors at three different high schools on the Davenport Indian Reservation during the 2013-2014 school year. In order to give context to their perspectives, I will briefly describe the Davenport Indian Reservation, as well as the schools that these students attended.

As noted in Chapter Two, individuals on the Davenport Indian Reservation experienced economic conditions that were among the poorest in the country. At the time of this study, the per capita income on the Davenport Indian Reservation was just over $6,000 per person, and the unemployment rate was over 80%. 1 in 4 children were born with fetal alcohol syndrome, over ½ of adults over the age of 40 had diabetes, the infant mortality rate was 300% higher than the national average, and the average life expectancy was between 45 and 52 years (Lakota, 2015).

Educationally, the dropout and graduation rates at these schools were significantly worse than the national averages. The three public high schools on the reservation had a 4-year graduation rate between 19% and 48% and a dropout rate between 9% and 22% (Bureau of Indian Education, 2012). In comparison, the national public school graduation rate among Native Americans during this same time period was approximately 67% (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014) and the dropout rate was 12.4% (Aud et al., 2012). It was unclear whether these sets of statistics treated student mobility in the same way, so these numbers may not be directly comparable. Nevertheless, it seems clear that these schools and students were working to find success in a system that faced greater challenges than many other schooling environments.

The schools in this study represent three of the four high schools on the Davenport Indian Reservation. The one school that was not included, which I will refer to as Rangeview School, was similar to the other public schools in terms of its students' academic proficiency and graduation rates, but it was the smallest of the four schools, and it was also the most geographically isolated.

Efforts were made to include Rangeview in the study. In fact, the school board at Rangeview had approved the school as a data collection site. However, once it came time to interview students, the school became unresponsive to my requests. As a result, the school was not included in this study, and I am unable to claim that these findings represent the high-achieving students at all four high schools across the reservation. It is possible that the geographic isolation of Rangeview would have produced a different perspective on how students thought about their community and their future possibilities. Alternatively, given that all the towns in this study were relatively small, and students at all the schools talked about the lack of economic opportunities available to them, these students may have been quite similar in their

perspective on the future. Unfortunately, without actually talking to these students, I can only speculate as to how students at Rangeview would have responded. Consequently, caution should be taken in generalizing these findings to the reservation as a whole.

Although the three schools that were included will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, in order to help orient the reader to the similarities and differences that existed among these schools, I will provide a brief overview of each school.

Rockwood School

Rockwood School was a private K-12 Lakota, Catholic, Jesuit school on the Davenport Indian Reservation, and was in fact the only private high school on the reservation. It was located just outside the largest town on the reservation, which had a population of less than 20,000 people. The school sought to develop students' minds and spirits through an academically intensive education that was grounded in both Lakota and Catholic values.

Rockwood School aimed to have 100% of its graduates enroll in post-secondary institutions, and it was the only school on the Davenport Indian Reservation that was explicitly designed to be college preparatory in nature. As a consequence of this emphasis on post-secondary education, Rockwood School has regularly produced recipients of prestigious awards and scholarships.

The staff at Rockwood School was composed of a mixture of Native American teachers and AmeriCorps volunteers, with AmeriCorps volunteers making up approximately two-thirds of the teaching staff. The AmeriCorps volunteers typically stayed for two years and lived on the grounds of the school.

Approximately 200 students were enrolled in the high school, 70% of whom were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Admission to the high school was contingent upon the completion of an admissions form, vacancies within the school, a minimum GPA of 2.0 if the student was transferring from another school, and a score on the Rockwood admissions exam that was sufficient to indicate academic proficiency for the grade in which the student was entering. Continued enrollment at Rockwood was contingent upon a student maintaining a 1.70 GPA at the end of their freshman year, attending tutoring if the school deemed it necessary, and maintaining appropriate levels of behavior and conduct.

Bridgman School

Bridgman School was a public K-12 school operated by the Bureau of Indian Education. It was located in a town of less than 20,000 people on the Davenport Indian Reservation. The school's mission was to empower students to be life-long learners who were grounded in Lakota values, thereby enhancing their potential to provide a successful life for their self, their family, and their community.

The staff at Bridgman was composed of a mixture of Native American and white teachers. Bridgman School did not utilize AmeriCorps or Teach for America teachers, and instead opted for teachers who had undertaken a more traditional path to certification. This produced a teaching staff that had the greatest proportion of Native American teachers of any of the three schools.

Given that Bridgman was a public school, there were no academic requirements for admission. The school served approximately 450 high school students from the town and

surrounding areas. 100% of the students who attended Bridgman were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Aspen School

Aspen School was a public K-12 tribal grant school, meaning that it is operated by the tribe, but funded by the Bureau of Indian Education. It was located in a town of less than 1,000 people on the Davenport Indian Reservation. The mission of this school was to create an environment that supported academic and Lakota excellence among its students. The school's mission recognized the role of education in shaping future tribal leaders, and the school made concerted efforts to incorporate students' Lakota values into a curriculum designed to provide students with the academic and social skills necessary to achieve their post-secondary goals.

In addition to the school's mission of developing future tribal leaders and preparing students for life after school, the school had stated aims of actively working to form collaborative partnerships with parents and the community, increasing the high school graduation rate, and working to help its students find success in their post-secondary decisions.

The staff at Aspen was composed of a mixture of Native American teachers and Teach for America teachers. In total, approximately 75% of the staff was Native American, though the percentage of Native American teachers was less than 50%. The Teach for America teachers were predominantly white, though efforts were underway to recruit more Native Americans into the Teach for American program. The Teach for America teachers generally remained at Aspen for two years and lived within the community.

As a public school, there were no academic requirements to enroll at Aspen. The school served approximately 350 high school students from the town and surrounding areas, 95% of

whom were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Given the rural location of the school, Aspen provided transportation to and from school for students who lived within a 50-mile radius.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited from the three high schools described above. Given the relatively small student population of these schools, I sought to interview 15 high-achieving (GPA of at least 3.0) junior and senior students at each of the three schools.

The decision to study high-achieving 11th and 12th grade students was made for two reasons. First, with regard to their grade-level, I felt it was necessary to interview older students, as they were more likely to have had the life experiences and cognitive development necessary to consider the opportunities available to them within the school, community, and society as a whole. Without this experience and cognitive development, I believed it would be less likely that they would have critically examined how issues such as limited job opportunities and discrimination might affect their future.

As far as my emphasis on only high-achieving students, this decision was made in order to respond to the current dearth of research on successful Native American students. From a theoretical perspective, it seems problematic that most studies of Native American educational achievement focus almost exclusively on low-performing students. As many researchers have noted (Carter, 2008; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008; Troyna, 1984), this unilateral focus on underachievement has led to distorted and oversimplified views of the academic experiences of many minority groups. I believe that as much can be learned from the successes of students as from their failures, and I am hopeful that a focus on high-achieving

students can shift the discourse towards a more positive and accurate understanding of the experiences of Native American students.

Prior to my recruitment of these students, this study was subject to approval by the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board, the Tribal Research Review Board, as well as the school boards at Aspen, Bridgman, and Rangeview. At the fourth school, Rockwood, permission was granted directly by the superintendent of the school.

After receiving approval to conduct research, students were recruited through the posting of flyers in central areas of each school. These flyers contained a description of the research study, my contact information, and compensation information. Students received $20 in cash for their participation. If a student informed me of their desire to participate, the appropriate consent documents were given to them. If the student was over 18, they returned the consent documents with their signature. If the student was under 18, the students had to have the consent form signed by their legal guardian, as well as provide both oral and written consent prior to the start of the interview.

Following each interview, I encouraged participants to share my contact information with any of their friends who would qualify for the study. This method of snowball sampling produced only a small number of participants (n=5). The vast majority of participants were a result of the posted flyers (n=37).

In total, 42 students were interviewed for this project: 11 from Rockwood, 16 from Aspen, and 15 from Bridgman. This represents 30.6% of eligible juniors and seniors at Rockwood (11 out of 36) and 50% at Aspen (16 out of 32). I was unable to get information regarding the total number of juniors and seniors at Bridgman School who had a 3.0, but these 15

students represented 13.5% of the total population of juniors and seniors at Bridgman School (15 out of 111). This is in comparison to 12.1% of the total juniors and seniors at Rockwood (11 out of 91), and 14.5% of juniors and seniors at Aspen (16 out of 110).

In summary, my response rate among the total population of students within each school was between 12.1% and 14.5%. However, it differed by school in terms of what proportion of the high-achieving students this represented. At Rockwood, this was 30.6% of the high-achieving Lakota students. At Aspen, this was 50% of the eligible students. While I was unable to obtain the necessary data to calculate the percentage of eligible students at Bridgman that were represented in this study, I believe that given the similarities between Aspen and Bridgman in terms of demographics, class size, graduation rates, and other measures of achievement, it is likely that the 15 students I interviewed at Bridgman represented close to 50% of the eligible student population.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide the grade, gender, and GPA of the participants at each school (students have been given pseudonyms). In terms of the demographics of participants at these three schools, 66.7% of respondents at both Rockwood and Bridgman were seniors, while 62.5% of respondents at Aspen were seniors. This slight skew towards seniors was to be expected given that most seniors were 18 years of age and were able to consent for themselves, thereby saving the extra step of having to take the consent form home to be signed and then to contact me to set up an interview.

Also skewed was the distribution of gender responses by school. At Rockwood, 45.5% of respondents were female. This was in comparison to 53.3% at Bridgman and 62.5% of Aspen.

Without having full access to the list of students who were eligible to participate in this study, I cannot make any conclusions as to why this distribution varied by school.

The average grade point average of participants by school ranged from 3.32 to 3.38. However, given that the curriculum, teacher backgrounds, and academic expectations varied by school, it is not possible to directly compare grade point averages at different schools. Nevertheless, the similarity of these grade point averages, as well as the relative distribution of juniors and seniors interviewed at each school, would suggest that my recruitment strategy captured similar groups of students at all three schools.

Table 1: Rockwood Student Demographics

Name	**Gender**	**Grade**	**Student Reported GPA**
Henry	Male	12	3.4
Patricia	Female	12	3.0
Raymond	Male	12	3.0
Jill	Female	12	3.3
Mary	Female	12	3.67
Margaret	Female	11	3.614
Victor	Male	12	3.6
Albert	Male	12	3.5
Mindy	Female	11	3.0
Derek	Male	12	3.2
Anthony	Male	11	3.63

Table 2: Bridgman Student Demographics

Name	Gender	Grade	Student Reported GPA
Keith	Male	12	3.0
John	Male	12	3.2
Alice	Female	11	3.0
Thomas	Male	12	3.0
Linda	Female	12	3.8
Merlin	Male	12	3.18
Bobby	Male	12	3.5
Tasha	Female	12	3.65
Mallory	Female	11	3.7
Joanne	Female	12	3.6
Erica	Female	11	3.46
Fredrick	Male	11	3.2
Janet	Female	12	3.5
Theresa	Female	12	3.6
Melvin	Male	11	3.3

Table 3: Aspen Student Demographics

Name	Gender	Grade	Student Reported GPA
Connie	Female	12	3.29
Laura	Female	11	3.0
Nicole	Female	11	3.71
Audrey	Female	11	3.21
Richard	Male	12	3.0
Melissa	Female	12	3.9
Howard	Male	12	3.2
Breanna	Female	12	3.0
Charles	Male	12	3.0
Alan	Male	12	3.3
Maggie	Female	12	3.35
Stanley	Male	11	3.0
Eric	Male	12	4.0
Sandra	Female	12	3.25
Traci	Female	11	3.12
Dana	Female	11	3.8

Data Collection

Data collection for this project occurred during the 2013-2014 school year. The data collection entailed individual interviews, as well as the collection of publicly available documents (i.e., school board minutes, grant proposals, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) describing the school. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by myself, and were deleted upon completion of the transcription. Transcripts, interview notes, documents, and related analytical work were maintained on CTools, a secure website provided for student and faculty use by the University of Michigan.

Individual Interviews

Through the use of semi-structured individual interviews (Maxwell, 2004; Merriam, 2009), I hoped to capture students' views of their experiences within their schools and their goals for the future. I sought to explore the centrality of their Lakota identity, their interpretations of the factors that they attributed to their academic success, the ways that they felt the school either supported or hindered their learning, the extent to which external factors shaped their goals, their thoughts on what motivated their schooling decisions, and their hopes for the future.

By using interviews, I wanted to capture information that I could not obtain by simply observing students within the school. In the words of Patton (2002):

> "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe…We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective." (p. 340-341)

The interview protocol for these interviews can be found in Appendix A. It should be noted that while these questions were organized by topic, they were written to be semi-structured

in nature, with the hope that the conversations around certain topics would produce students' thoughts on other topics of interest as well. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to shape each individual interview in a way that was most appropriate given the information that was being shared. This format also allowed me to take up certain topics as they arose in conversation, and to make the most of the spontaneity of students' responses, creating a more organic conversation (Merriam, 2009). While I could have opted for a more structured format and still captured the key themes and ideas, I felt such a format would not be well suited for the richness of the conversations I anticipated, or for the different worldviews that each student brought with them.

It is worth noting that while I approached the interview process with some flexibility, each of the interviews began with a discussion of the student's Lakota identity, as this identity served as an anchor point in investigating how they interpreted the school they were in, how they felt about their schooling experience, how they viewed society, what their long-term aspirations were, and how these long-term aspirations shaped their current schooling experiences. It was my belief that a student's Lakota identity would have a significant impact on how they viewed life, and would consequently influence a number of topics central to this study, including whether they viewed culturally relevant pedagogy as important, whether they viewed the race of the teacher as an important factor in their learning, where they wanted to live after high school, and what their post-secondary aspirations were. By beginning each interview with a discussion of how the student made sense of their Lakota identity, I was able to use it as an anchor point in shaping the remainder of our conversation.

The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 60 minutes, though generally being in the 50 to 60 minute range. Those that were significantly shorter occurred when students

unexpectedly had to be picked up from their after school activities, or when the interviewee showed up late for the interview. In these cases, our conversations focused primarily on the questions in the interview protocol, with little opportunity to explore their answers in greater depth.

Documents

Over the course of the school year, I collected documents that could be used to help establish the context of my study. The sorts of documents that I obtained included federal grant proposals by the schools discussing challenges they faced and their efforts to address them, school board presentations designed to provide an overview of the current state of the school, federal school accountability reports, and email correspondences between various school officials and myself describing the sample population within each school. These documents primarily served as supplemental data to contextualize my research questions, study design, findings, and conclusions.

Data Analysis

Interview Analysis

Student interview data from the individual interviews was transcribed and coded. Given the literature review, a number of theory-generated codes were developed in advance of my data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The initial list of theory-generated codes revolved around the following six topics: 1) Curriculum relevance; 2) Perceptions of teachers; 3) Peer influence; 4) Value of schooling; 5) Barriers to success; and 6) Academic decision-making. While these codes were driving forces in the formulation of my research questions, and they offer insight into my underlying thinking about what would come out of the interviews, they

proved to be insufficient in capturing the diversity of themes that emerged from my interviews. As a result, a method of open coding was used to identify the themes that emerged from the interviews. As described by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011), "In *open coding* the ethnographer reads fieldnotes line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate." (p. 143)

In total, 41 codes were created to capture the array of topics that emerged from these interviews. The codebook that I used can be found in Appendix B. Broadly speaking, these codes captured themes of cultural identity, the role of students' family and friends in their education, students' perceptions of the importance of education, students' schooling experiences, students' post-secondary aspirations, students' views of racism and discrimination, students' beliefs regarding factors that promote success and failure in both school and life, students' sources of motivation, and the relationship that students saw between their cultural identity and their academic success.

While these broad categories are overly coarse, I offer them for the purpose of comparing them to my initial theory-generated codes. Though there was some overlap, the interviews provided a richness and depth of information that rendered the initial codes insufficient. Consequently, this method of open coding allowed me to better make sense of what the students were saying, as opposed to utilizing my preconceived analytical lens and attempting to fit the students' thoughts and words into my pre-existing narrative. Using the codebook, the interview transcripts were coded using NVivo, with nodes being created for each of the themes that emerged during the open coding process.

Following the open coding process, descriptive memos were written for each interview. The purpose of these memos was twofold. First, these descriptive memos were sent to each interview participant as a form of member-checking (Merriam, 2009). Students were asked to let me know whether I misinterpreted or misrepresented their words or positions on issues. I heard back from only two students, and discussed with them areas of divergence in my understanding. I believe that this attempt at respondent validation strengthened the validity of my results, as well as served as an important check to ensure that I was not allowing my biases, both in regard to my theoretical orientation and my positioning a white researcher, to distort my findings.

Second, these memos allowed me to organize the themes that emerged around the research questions and to examine the interrelatedness of my codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The creation of these memos served as a useful starting point to systematically collect and organize the themes that arose from each individual and to then look across students within each school to identify the larger themes and patterns that had emerged.

After this portion of the analytical process, general summaries were written for each school and shared with the school board and superintendent as an opportunity for them to provide further feedback on what I learned. Additionally, I wanted to ensure that I could offer the schools some preliminary findings prior to the start of the 2014-2015 school year, so as to give the school time to consider how they might choose to respond to the thoughts and concerns raised by their students.

A more fine-grained analysis of the coding scheme occurred after these presentations. For each school, I created a matrix of students' responses, organized by theme and student name. This matrix allowed for comparisons among students by theme, as well as allowed me to see the

interconnectedness of different themes, such as how connected a student felt to their Lakota identity and where they hoped to live after high school or how important they viewed the race of their teachers. To aid my analysis of the matrices, analytical memos were created for each school that described both the general themes that emerged within the school, as well as apparent linkages among the themes.

These matrices and memos were then compared across schools to identify the similarities and differences that emerged. By looking across schools, I hoped to examine whether important similarities or differences existed among students within these schools, as I believed that school-level factors might help explain variations in the ways students made sense of the risk and protective factors in their environment.

The results of these cross-school comparisons were captured in the form of analytical memos that analyzed the similarities and differences between schools. These comparisons resulted in four additional memos: 1) Rockwood vs. Aspen; 2) Rockwood vs. Bridgman; 3) Aspen vs. Bridgman; and 4) Similarities and differences among all three schools. These memos were then used to guide the empirical chapters of this study.

Positioning of Researcher

Before presenting my findings, it is important to acknowledge my positioning as a researcher and cultural outsider on this reservation. I feel that in order to properly contextualize my results, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the biases I brought to this research, as well as make clear what efforts I undertook to minimize my biases.

As noted by numerous researchers (Agbo, 2001; Brayboy, 2006; Brayboy & Dehyle, 2000; Anglas Grande, 2000; Peshkin, 1997), there is a troubling history of white researchers

exploiting Native Americans for the purposes of research. This exploitation has led to a warranted degree of distrust of white researchers in the Native American community, and has led to skepticism about the appropriateness of white researchers writing about the experiences of Native Americans.

In addition to the concerns over cultural exploitation, Tate IV (1997) argues that one's reality is very much shaped by their culture and experiences. Given this argument, as a white researcher, I do not experience reality in the same way that Native Americans do. What appears natural to me may appear as oppression to another group. Consequently, from this perspective, I am unable to fully understand and properly analyze Native American students' stories.

While Brayboy and Dehyle (2000) recognize a similar challenge in interpreting the experiences of another group, they do not feel that these limitations need to eliminate outside researchers from working with Native American populations. Their suggestion to white researchers is to have Native Americans assist with the interpretation of results. Others have called for non-Native American researchers to consult with Native Americans so as to ensure the use of culturally respectful questions in the data collection (Demmert, McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, & Leos, 2006).

In response to the need for creating culturally respectful questions, I believe that the work I did beforehand, which included responding to feedback from the Tribal Research Review Board, the Bridgman School Board, the Buffalo School Board, and the Aspen School board, has allowed me to be thoughtful in the design of my questions, and to ensure that I am taking into account the concerns and views of the tribe, particularly in relation to issues of exploitation and sovereignty. In terms of my analysis, I have engaged in member-checking with respondents to

ensure that I am accurately representing students' words. Further help in being culturally respectful and thoughtful came as a result of my conversations with individuals at these schools, as well as other tribal members with whom I have developed fruitful working relationships.

I believe that sharing my results with key actors within each of these schools has allowed me to further refine my interpretations of the data and to understand the ways in which my interpretations of students' responses either converge or diverge from their understanding of students' experiences. Through this continued collaborative process, I believe that I have conducted a study that, to the extent possible, lessens my own biases and ensures that students' views are accurately captured in my analysis.

An additional concern related to my role as a white researcher comes from my perspective of what education should be. From my own background, education was a tool for getting a better job and perhaps attaining some level of upward social mobility. When I initially asked myself, "What is it that I hope will happen as a result of this study?" I found myself thinking that I want the academic outcomes of Lakota students to improve so that they can have better job opportunities. The problem with this perspective is that it is my own imposition of values on what people should strive for. As David Seals (1991) states, "Since when does a whiteman, no matter how well-meaning, tell us what we have to do to make it in America?" (p. 7). Consequently, I have made conscientious efforts to not take on the role of cultural savior or someone who determines what is best for the Lakota people. I am hopeful that by having taken a deliberate look at the preconceived notions I have about education, I have lessened the ways in which I impart my bias on this research.

For Lakota students, seeking out economic opportunity may mean leaving their family and culture, and being forced to assimilate into white society. I find the idea that my research may be used to push towards policies that underlie goals of assimilation and the further extinction of Lakota culture to be quite troubling. Therefore, I have taken a great amount of pride in attempting to understand and honor the educational goals of the Lakota. Dehyle (1992) and Peshkin (1997) clearly demonstrate that education is valued in Native American society. However, so too is the importance of maintaining one's culture and keeping close ties with the community. By allowing these students to tell me what education means to them, I believe that I have made a concerted effort to be respectful of their goals and educational ideals.

A final concern related to my role as a white researcher comes from what Peshkin (1997) termed "logofixion." In Peshkin's words:

> "Though logofixion, unlike crucifixion, is seldom disastrous, it encompasses a range of meanings and outcomes, some more insidious than others, all of them more annoying than fatal: to write or speak pityingly; to cast as victim; to predict or forecast dire ends; to present uninvited solutions to the problems of others; and to romanticize or to extol, as in creating images of the noble savage, the noble elder, the noble cosmology." (p. 20)

While portions of this study may portray the Lakota, particularly their economic situation, in a way that seems overly negative, it is important that I write in a way that is truthful. A way that both realistically captures the situation of the Lakota people, while at the same is not written in a way that portrays the Lakota as a group to be saved. Avoiding such rhetoric is something I have consciously sought to avoid, though I have quickly realized that my own cultural biases shape the way I think about economic and educational goals. This is a challenge, but one that I have consciously sought to address. Finding a balance among these varying concerns, while still writing in a way that is intellectually honest and both fairly and accurately describes the educational experiences expressed to me by these Lakota students was a difficult

undertaking, but one that I took very seriously. I am hopeful that readers of this work find it critical but culturally respectful, thoughtful but honest, but most importantly, one that maintains the integrity of the Lakota people.

Conclusion

As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, my analysis of these students' experiences has made apparent that while all of these students were able to find academic success, there were structural factors that worked to limit and shape the agency that these students had in constructing their future.

My analysis has revealed that while there were some common characteristics among these academically resilient students, such as having strong support systems and believing in the value of education, the experiences of these students were strongly shaped by the school they attended. These three schools differed in their expectations for students, the compositions of their teaching staffs, the extent to which students' Lakota identity was valued in the school, and the ways in which the school prepared students for college. As a result, students' academic resilience took on very different forms at these schools, a fact that had important implications for how students constructed their post-secondary aspirations.

CHAPTER V

Students' Aspirations and Life Outside of School

As I sought to understand the factors supporting students' academic resilience, two themes emerged. The first was that at all three of these schools, there was a tremendous amount of similarity in students' out-of-school experiences, particularly as it related to the social supports in these students' lives. These students had strong support systems, believed in the value of education, and had peers who pushed them to do their best, all of which supported their academic success. The second theme to emerge was that students' post-secondary aspirations differed in significant ways, and these differences tended to be associated with the schools that students attended. Although I had anticipated that these schools would shape students' aspirations in important ways, I did not anticipate the degree of divergence that I found at these three schools.

As a prelude to my examination of the factors supporting these students' success and future aspirations, I will utilize the first part of this chapter to describe the heterogeneity that existed in these students' post-secondary aspirations. Then, in the remainder of this chapter, I will examine students' lives outside of school and consider how these out-of-school experiences acted as protective factors in supporting students' academic success and future aspirations.

Students' Aspirations

Numerous researchers have reported a strong relationship between students' high school performance and their educational and occupational aspirations (Brookover, Erickson, & Joiner,

1967; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Manski & Wise, 1983; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970). Consequently, given that these students were all academically successful, all were living in a rural area, and all shared a common cultural background, I anticipated that there would be similarity among these students in their post-secondary aspirations. While I expected some natural variation among students, I thought this variation would be similar at each of the three schools, and more specifically, I did not expect that I would be able to predict the type of college a student hoped to attend just from knowing which high school they attended.

As can be seen in Table 4, although almost all students aspired to attend some form of post-secondary institution, the types of post-secondary institutions that students hoped to attend varied by school. The fact that nearly all students aspired to attend college would indicate that, on the whole, students' overall aspirations were more similar than they were different. However, the fact that there were such distinct variations in the types of schools that these students hoped to attend would seemingly indicate that there were important differences in the ways that these schools shaped students' post-secondary aspirations.

Table 4: Students' Educational Aspirations

Rockwood		Bridgman		Aspen	
Name	**College Type**	**Name**	**College Type**	**Name**	**College Type**
Henry	4-year out-of-state	Keith	4-year in- state	Connie	4-year in-state
Patricia	4-year out-of-state	John	Tribal College	Laura	4-year out-of-state
Raymond	4-year in-state	Alice	Vocational School	Nicole	4-year out-of-state
Jill	4-year out-of-state	Thomas	Does not intend to go to college	Audrey	4 year in-state
Mary	4-year out-of-state	Linda	4-year out-of-state	Richard	4-year in-state
Margaret	4-year out-of-state	Merlin	Tribal College	Melissa	4-year in-state
Victor	4-year out-of-state	Bobby	Tribal College	Howard	4-year out-of-state
Albert	Does not intend to go to college	Tasha	Tribal College	Breanna	Tribal College
Mindy	4-year out-of-state	Mallory	4-year out-of-state	Charles	Tribal College
Derek	4-year out-of-state	Joanne	4-year in-state	Alan	Tribal College
Anthony	4-year out-of-state	Erica	4-year out-of-state	Maggie	4-year in-state
		Fredrick	Does not intend to go to college	Stanley	4-year in-state
		Janet	Tribal College	Eric	4-year in-state
		Theresa	Tribal College	Sandra	4-year in-state
		Melvin	4-year out-of-state	Traci	Tribal College
				Dana	Vocational School

Students at Rockwood were much more likely to aspire to enroll at a 4-year out-of-state university than to aspire to attend either a tribal college or a 4-year in-state university. At Rockwood, 9 out of the 11 students aspired to enroll at a 4-year out-of-state university, one student aspired to attend a 4-year in-state university, and one student aspired to enlist in the Marines.

Students at Bridgman demonstrated more variability in the types of schools they hoped to enroll. In total, 6 out of 15 students aspired to enroll at a tribal college. This was in comparison to four students who aspired to enroll at a 4-year out-of-state university, two who aspired to enroll at a 4-year in-state university, and one who aspired to enroll at a vocational school. Two students at Bridgman did not aspire to attend college.

Finally, students at Aspen were more likely to aspire to enroll at a 4-year in-state university than any other type of post-secondary institution, with 8 out of 16 students hoping to go this route. Of the remaining eight students, three aspired to enroll at a 4-year out-of-state university, four aspired to enroll at a tribal college, and one student aspired to enroll at a vocational school.

In summary, Rockwood students were more likely to aspire to attend a 4-year out-of-state university than any other type of college or university, Bridgman students were more likely to aspire to attend a tribal college than any other type of college or university, and Aspen students were more likely to aspire to attend a 4-year in-state university than any other type of college or university.

Based on these differences, it would seem that although students' aspirations were similar in the sense that they almost all intended to enroll in post-secondary institutions, the types of institutions they aspired to attend varied, and this variation was often correlated with the high school they attended. Understanding the factors that shaped these students' aspirations was a central focus of this study.

Students' Experiences Outside of School

In order to understand the protective factors supporting these students' academic success and their post-secondary aspirations, I asked students a number of questions about their lives outside of school and the factors that supported their success. What was quite remarkable in these conversations was that these students shared a number of common protective factors that supported their academic success.

Almost all of the students in this study had a family who emphasized the value of education, had a strong support system in their life, and felt efficacious about their future. Each of these factors worked to support students' success and post-secondary aspirations. However, that is not to say these students were wholly the same. There were important differences among these students as well, including differences in students' connectedness to their Lakota identity, their views of the reservation, and their perspectives on racism and discrimination. In the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss these similarities and differences in detail, offering considerations as to the ways these factors likely shaped students' success and post-secondary aspirations.

Support Systems

Parents. In the conversations I had with students, one of the most commonly discussed factors supporting their educational success was the strong academic emphasis and support that they received from their families. These students were raised in environments where they were pushed to succeed academically, and in almost all situations, this meant being pushed towards attending college. For most students, this emphasis on education served to motivate them to do

well in school. In the following examples, Mallory, Audrey, and Anthony discuss this source of support and describe how their parental figures pushed them to do well in school.

> Interviewer: What do your parents say about the importance of education?
>
> Mallory (Bridgman): They really think it's important. Like they push us to do like good in school.
>
> Interviewer: Does that have an effect on you, having parents who value it?
>
> Mallory (Bridgman): Ya, like I feel like I have to try really hard in school all the time.
>
> Interviewer: Do you think that is part of the reason why you have such good grades?
>
> Mallory (Bridgman): Ya, probably.

> Interviewer: What does your grandma say about the importance of education?
>
> Audrey (Aspen): She says you need to get it to go anywhere in life. If you want good things you need one.
>
> Interviewer: So how does her saying that education is so important, how does that affect you?
>
> Audrey (Aspen): Makes me really want to strive to get my education, get out of high school, and go to college to be something, and so that way I can repay her all back for what she's done for me.

> Interviewer: What does your mom say about the importance of education?
>
> Anthony (Rockwood): She, strongly, highly recommends education. It's education or nothing with her. She despises anything that has nothing to do with education…She wants me to go to college and she doesn't want it to be under a 4-year degree. She said it has to be over.
>
> Interviewer: Ok, what kind of effect does that have on you?
>
> Anthony (Rockwood): Uhh, I don't know, it gives me confidence to go to college. And, well I don't know, you could say it kinda scares you, and it makes you want to go to college. She gives me long lectures that last hours and hours about what it would be like without an education.

Each of these students' family members stressed to them the value of education. Audrey's grandmother had instilled in her a belief that education was the way to a better life. In her grandmother's words, "you need to get it [education] to go anywhere in life." Not only did her grandmother's perspective push Audrey to do well in high school, but it increased her desire to "go to college to be something." Similarly, Mallory felt that the push from her parents increased the effort she put towards her schoolwork; a fact that she indicated likely supported her

academic success. For Anthony, his mom not only emphasized the value of education, but also made it clear to him that she expected him to go to a 4-year university. Anthony's mom talked to him about what life would be like without an education and instilled in him a belief that education was the key to the future he desired. For all three of these students, the push that they had received from their family was critical to how they perceived the value of education.

The responses of Mallory, Audrey, and Anthony were representative of students in this study as a whole. Across all three schools, when students were asked about the most important factor in explaining their success, the support of the people raising them was the most frequently cited explanation. The consistency in this response made it clear that these students' believed that the push for education that they received from their families was critical in shaping their motivation and drive to succeed.

Siblings. While a number of students spoke about the role that their parents had played in their academic success, a number of students also spoke about the impact that their siblings had on their success, and this was the case whether their siblings had been academically successful or unsuccessful. In the following examples, Audrey and Stanley describe the ways that their successful older siblings influenced their educational success.

> Audrey (Aspen): My second older sister, her name is Tana, and last year she was Miss Rodeo. And I really look up to her more than my oldest older sister, because she's going to college to become a speech therapist.
>
> Interviewer: Would you say that seeing her be successful pushes you in school?
>
> Audrey (Aspen): Ya, it makes me want to be just like her I think.

> Interviewer: Do any of these siblings, whether the one at Out-State University, or your sisters, influence you in any way?
>
> Stanley (Aspen): Ya, my older brother does a lot. He just, he always went to school. He's always been going to school.

Interviewer: Would you say you view him as a role model?

Stanley (Aspen): Ya, a lot. Because all my older sisters, they never, they can't really, I don't know what it is, but they went to college, they went off to a big college for a year and then they come back, so I'm not too sure what's…but he never quit. He went, he started in Midwest State, and he comes back once or twice a year, and he's there all the time.

Both Audrey and Stanley had older siblings who served as role models for how to become successful. Audrey spoke about her sister who was at college and was finding success in achieving her goals. Audrey expressed a desire to follow in her footsteps, stating, "it makes me want to be just like her." This desire to follow in her sister's footsteps helped her maintain her push for academic success, as well as set high goals for her future. Stanley's discussion of his older brother was focused less on a desire to be just like him, and more on the way his brother's perseverance served as a model for his own success. Stanley discussed the ways his other siblings had gone off to college and ended up coming back home. However, this was not the case for his brother, who stuck with college, and was achieving his goals. This perseverance on the part of his brother led Stanley to view him as a role model, a fact that influenced Stanley's hopes for his own future. For both of these students, their siblings' experiences not only pushed them to succeed in high school, but also helped them envision success for themselves in the future.

In contrast to the experiences of students like Stanley and Audrey, other students, such as Thomas and Charles, drew motivation from their siblings who had not been academically successful. In the following excerpts, Thomas and Charles describe the ways that their older siblings had served as a model for what not to do.

Thomas (Bridgman): My brother dropped out, the one in Oilville. Both of my brothers did. I'm the only one graduating.

Interviewer: Ya? So does that have any impact on you, seeing them not do well in school?

Thomas (Bridgman): Ya, it kinda does.

Interviewer: How so?

> Thomas (Bridgman): Just a lot, cause I don't want them to be sitting out there with no education. Looking like some bums.
>
> Interviewer: So your sister not going to college, does that matter to you?
>
> Charles (Aspen): Kind of, kind of gives me, like it kind of made me not think about going to college, and as I got into my senior year, I kinda thought about going to college, because she ain't doing nothing but sitting around at home.

For both Thomas and Charles, as well as the majority of students who had siblings that struggled, their siblings' experiences resulted in them believing that without an education, they would be sitting around, unable to do anything with their lives. Their siblings' experiences reinforced to them the importance of education and gave them additional motivation to strive for academic success. Thomas indicated that he was the only one of his siblings who was graduating high school, a fact that he attributed in part to the motivation he received from seeing his brothers drop out of school and struggle to find success of their own. He wanted to be able to help his brothers and not end up in a similar situation. Similarly, Charles, who had considered skipping college, described the way his perspective on education changed when he realized that not attending college would potentially put him in the same position as his sister, who he described as, "doing nothing but sitting around at home." For both of these students, the experiences and lifestyles of their older siblings served as motivation to get an education and to create better opportunities for themselves.

Beyond acting as a role model for what to do or not do, many students' siblings, both successful and unsuccessful, actively worked to ensure the success of their younger siblings. For Tasha and Mindy, both of whom had successful older siblings, their siblings acted as sources of support in their academic success. In the following examples, Tasha and Mindy describe what this support looked like.

Interviewer: Does having three successful older brothers have an impact on how you do in school?

Tasha (Bridgman): Ya.

Interviewer: How so?

Tasha (Bridgman): Umm, like, whenever I was in grade school, and like they were just starting high school, I was like, you know they were getting good grades and everything, and I was thinking, oh high school is going to be so easy. And then I got to high school, and it wasn't. It wasn't easy at all, but like having them around and stuff has like made it easier, because I could go to them and ask them for help with whatever I needed.

Interviewer: So did your older siblings do well in school?

Mindy (Rockwood): Ya.

Interviewer: Does that have any impact on what's expected of you?

Mindy (Rockwood): Ya. Like, because they basically had to earn their own scholarships and stuff, and ya.

Interviewer: Did they go to college?

Mindy (Rockwood): Ya, They're all 3 in college.

Interviewer: Do they talk to you about school?

Mindy (Rockwood): Ya. Well my big brother is the one who talks most about it. He always tries to check up on me and my grades. And make sure that, always tells me that I need to understand stuff.

Because Tasha and Mindy's siblings had been academically successful, they were prepared and confident to help their younger siblings make sense of the challenges they faced in school. Tasha felt that she could go to these siblings and ask for their help when she was having trouble in her classes. For Mindy, the support she received came as a result of her brother checking on her grades and consistently reinforcing to her the value of education. His efforts to reinforce the importance of doing well in school supported her in her efforts to be academically successful. While these efforts on the part of Mindy and Tasha's siblings took on different forms, both served as important protective factors that supported their academic success.

Although having academically successful siblings provided Tasha and Mindy with support systems that helped them find success, this does not mean that less successful siblings were unable to provide motivation and support as well. In the following examples, Traci and

Margaret describe the forms of support that they received from their siblings who struggled in school.

> Interviewer: So, do your brothers and sisters, either ones that dropped out or the ones who graduated, does their education have any impact on you?
>
> Traci (Aspen): Ya, like the ones that didn't make it all the way, they always make sure I'm in school and make sure I don't make the mistakes they did.
>
> Interviewer: Ok.
>
> Traci (Aspen): Ya, so, I'm the youngest, so they all make sure I'm doing better than they have.

> Interviewer: Did your older siblings do well in school?
>
> Margaret (Rockwood): My oldest, she, this sounds bad, but she kind of pushes me in school because she didn't, she wasn't really good in school, like, umm, my sister she umm, she was like, one of the last ranked in her class, she didn't really do good in sports, wasn't really involved in like extracurriculars or anything, and she's like, after high school she really struggled. She struggled getting a house, getting a job. She was working paycheck to paycheck. And, she got pregnant at 19, and was like a single mother, and she says this isn't the life you want to live. You want to make sure you have a good education, a good job, a nice house, and not worried about paycheck to paycheck. So she kind of pushes me a lot.
>
> Interviewer: Does that motivate you? Influence you?
>
> Margaret (Rockwood): Ya, I don't want to, I don't want to be just living paycheck to paycheck, I want to be able to afford myself, and my expenses, and then some. Enough to like raise a family, with or without a father around.

The siblings of Traci and Margaret actively sought to ensure that their younger siblings did not go through the same struggles that they themselves had. Margaret's sister pushed her to work hard in school in order to ensure that she could live a better life than what she was living herself, telling Margaret directly, "this isn't the life you want to live." As a result, Margaret felt motivated to succeed and strived to create a comfortable life for herself. In the case of Traci, who had siblings that differed in their academic success, it was the less successful siblings who she found to be the most supportive and most invested in keeping her on the right track. Traci spoke of the way these siblings made sure that she was avoiding the mistakes that they had made, and that she was in school and doing her best. Through these efforts, Traci felt supported by her siblings in her efforts to be academically successful.

As the examples of both Margaret and Traci make apparent, it was not just the successful siblings who had important insights and support to offer. These less academically successful siblings provided support to their younger siblings and pushed them to reach the academic goals that they themselves had not achieved.

When these examples are examined collectively, it is clear that students' siblings often acted in ways that served to protect them against the factors that might have otherwise inhibited their success, whether that be through helping them with their homework or making sure that they avoided the bad decisions that they themselves had made. In all cases, these students were able to utilize their siblings' experiences in a positive manner and strive to be as successful as they believed they were capable of being.

Peers. A final example of the importance of social supports came in students' discussions of their peers. In the following examples from Anthony, Henry, and John, these students discuss the ways that their peers pushed them to achieve their academic potential.

> Interviewer: What do your friends think about the importance of education?
>
> Anthony (Rockwood): Uhh, well they all think it's very important too. Like my kind of group that I hang out with would be the kinds that are like going to go to college, and we're all kind of challenging each other, like who's going to go the furthest, and who's going to go to the nicest college, and who's going to have the best grade and stuff like that.

> Interviewer: Do you have people in your life who tell you that you can accomplish whatever you set your mind to?
>
> Henry (Rockwood): Ya, like a lot.
>
> Interviewer: Who sticks out?
>
> Henry (Rockwood): Umm, probably my friend since, umm, daycare I guess.
>
> Interviewer: Ok. And what kind of effect does that have on you?
>
> Henry (Rockwood): Umm, I think it's, it's really motivating me, especially from her, cause she's one of the smartest students here, and she's been pushing me ever since I got here too, especially when we stepped

> into high school, cause I knew that the classes were going to be more challenging, and so she made me push harder in academics, and I guess she did a really good job.
>
> Interviewer: Does having friends who value education, does that like push you or have any sort of impact?
>
> John (Bridgman): Ya, ya, it like keeps me coming to school and wanting to graduate with them. Cause I was kinda like, ya, doing not so good. Where they was like trying not to let me graduate, but I got that all figured out, and I'm up there again with good grades, and ya, just they push me to come to school every day. Every time I'm not there, they come to my house or something and tell me to get there. And ya, they always, or we always push each other though.

For Anthony, the push for academic success came from having an academically competitive group of friends. As he stated, "we're all kind of challenging each other, like who's going to go the furthest, and who's going to go to the nicest college, and who's going to have the best grade and stuff like that." As a result of the friendly competition that he and his friends had, Anthony wanted to have the best grades, go to the best college, and go the furthest in life. As is evident from these goals, not only were Anthony's peers supporting his current success, but they were helping shape his future aspirations as well.

For Henry and John, their peers' support of their academic success came less from friendly competition and more from the encouragement and support they offered. For Henry, this support came from a high-achieving friend, who he described as, "pushing me ever since I got here." Henry attributed his good grades in part to this push, stating, "she made me push harder in academics, and I guess she did a really good job." For John, the support he received from his friends was less about pushing him towards high grades and more about ensuring that he stayed on the right track. John discussed how these friends made sure he was coming to school and staying on track to graduate, factors that he indicated had an important impact on his academic success.

While these three examples vary in the ways that students' peers supported their academic success, in all three cases, the actions and support of their peers acted as protective factors that promoted students' academic resilience.

When looking across the role of friends, siblings, and parental figures in these students' lives, it seems clear that one of the common themes among successful students on the Davenport Indian Reservation was the presence of strong social supports. The support that students received from the people around them strengthened their belief in the value of education, helped students maintain pro-schooling behaviors, and provided students with motivation and guidance in support of their goals. At all three schools, this emphasis on the value of social support was the most common thread in each of the interviews, and it was often characterized by students as the single most important factor supporting their success. These support systems worked to protect students against the prospect of academic underperformance that plagues many Native American youth. These students also expressed a belief that these support systems were highly influential in shaping their post-secondary aspirations.

Value of Education

Another important similarity among students in this study was that they all believed in the value of education, and they fully embraced the idea that education was the way to a successful future. Although students differed in terms of how they imagined their future success, they all believed that the effort they were putting towards school would help them achieve their goals. The following four examples capture this perspective.

> Interviewer: So why does it matter to do well in school? What's the long-term payoff?
>
> John (Bridgman): Long-term payoff is getting a good job. Cause most people they just get little basic job that's minimum wage, but if you get an education and go get a degree in college, than you might be able to get a better paying job that's way better than around here.

Interviewer: So what's the long-term payoff of doing well in school?

Alan (Aspen): Long-term payoff is you become wealthy. Be better educated. Won't be on the rez, looking for summer jobs.

Interviewer: So money and jobs is the main thing you think of?

Alan (Aspen): It's a lot, what everybody thinks of on the rez, cause there's very little.

Interviewer: So why does it matter if someone goes to college? You said that's a really important thing, so why is that?

Maggie (Aspen): Just like I said before that there's no motivation to go to school, and like, no one really cares to go to college, so when I think you do it's really great because umm, you have that, you have that degree and a lot of people, they come back with that degree and they help around the community. Umm, they'll go off to college and they'll still come back and they'll get a job here, so I just think that it's really good because we need educated people. We need that knowledge around here, so that's why I think it's so important and because there's hardly any jobs around here and it's becoming to the point where you need that degree. I think that's why it's so important to get that education.

Interviewer: So why does doing well in school matter? What's the long-term payoff of it?

Keith (Bridgman): I would say money, you know, you get a better job. You get a better house, and you get, you know, better future for your future children, and you know, better education for them as well. And, and it helps further the Lakota people because most of us, most, a lot of people I guess, think of us as savages still, and I don't like that. And the reason I'm trying to do good in school is to break that, like I don't want to be thought of as, you know, like horseback riding, teepee sleeping, you know? That's, I don't want to be thought of as that, I want to be thought of as someone who is smart and successful, you know? Getting the education would help further that, you know? Help steer away from the stereotypes and the racism.

In all four of these examples, students made it clear that they believed that there was a direct relationship between their educational success and their ability to have the future they desired. However, as is apparent from these excerpts, students' perspectives varied on what this future success would look like. John and Alan made it clear that, to them, success meant moving away from Davenport. As John noted, "if you get an education and go get a degree in college, than you might be able to get a better paying job that's way better than around here." Similarly, Alan viewed the long-term payoff of doing well in school as allowing him to move away from Davenport. Alan did not want to be, "on the rez, looking for summer jobs."

While John and Alan defined success as moving away from the reservation, Maggie and Keith emphasized the connection they saw between their academic success and their opportunity to better the lives of those within the community. For Maggie, the idea that education would allow her the opportunity to better the lives of the Lakota people was connected to her belief that a more educated citizenry would allow for better jobs and more knowledge in the community. As she stated when discussing the people who went off to college and returned to help the community, "I just think that it's really good because we need educated people. We need that knowledge around here." By attaining the knowledge available in college, Maggie believed that she would be better situated to be transformative within her community.

For Keith, the transformative power of education came as a result of the way it provided him with the opportunity to challenge stereotypes, a fact that he hoped would in turn lessen racism. As he noted, "Getting the education would help further that…Help steer away from the stereotypes and the racism." While Keith made note of the ways that education would benefit him on a personal level, he expressed an awareness that his success may impact how others perceived the Lakota as a whole, a fact that caused him to take a more macro-perspective on the value of academic success.

Not to be lost in these diverging perspectives is the fact that, for both sets of students, academic success was viewed as a critical component to achieving their goals. Whether academic success was seen as a way to better the community, or as a means to seek out individual opportunities and mobility, these students held firm to their belief that academic success was a critical component to achieving their goals. This belief in the value of education likely served as an important protective factor in these students' academic success and allowed

them to maintain their push for academic excellence in the face of risk factors that have historically worked to compromise the life chances of Lakota youth.

Internal Locus of Control

A final commonality among students at all three schools was where they placed the responsibility for their success. These students were consistent in their belief that they were the ones who would be responsible for their own successes or failures, and these students felt confident in their ability to achieve success. Although students' goals and aspirations varied across schools, these variations did not appear to be related to whether students felt in control of their future. As the following examples from Alan and Melvin illustrate, the students I spoke with held firm to the belief that their success was dependent on their own efforts.

> Interviewer: Ok, do you feel like there's any barriers that could keep you from going to college? Or doing well in college?
>
> Alan (Aspen): Just me.
>
> Interviewer: Just you?
>
> Alan (Aspen): Uh huh, I'm the only one, like if I lose motivation it's because I let myself. It's just me that has to push me in the end.

> Interviewer: Do you think it has an impact on you to be hanging out with people who also care about doing well in school?
>
> Melvin (Bridgman): Yes and no. Because like, yes because it's good to have friends that like influence you and do that, but it's like, again you're your own person. You make your own decisions and in my eyes, you make what happens in your life happen. So, it's both ways right there.

As these excerpts from both Alan and Melvin illustrate, there was a belief among students that they were the sole determiners of their future success. Alan believed that he was the only person who would be responsible for his success, and he was also willing to take the blame if he did not push himself to the extent that was necessary. In his words, "It's just me that has to push me in the end." Similarly, while Melvin recognized the ways that his friends might

influence him, he believed that each individual was responsible for their own decisions and that he was the sole determiner of what happens in his life, a fact that gave him confidence in his ability to achieve his goals.

Knowing that students felt responsible for their own outcomes is critical to understanding their success. If these students had felt that their future outcomes were out of their hands, or were dependent upon external factors that were structured against them, these students may have been much less likely to maintain their drive for academic success. Instead, by believing that their success was dependent on their own efforts, these students expressed a sense of ownership of their academic outcomes and took it upon themselves to work hard to create the future they envisioned.

Differences Among Students Outside of School

Up to this point, I have discussed the many similarities in these students' lives outside of school, particularly in their social support systems and in the ways that these supports worked to promote their academic success. However, that is not to suggest that there was not considerable variability in these students' lives outside of school. In fact, these students had markedly different perspectives on their Lakota identity and in how they responded to experiences with racism and discrimination. As will become clear in my discussion of these topics, these differing perspectives led to variations in the types of protective factors that students possessed, as well as in how these protective factors worked to support students' success.

Lakota Identity

One of the most salient areas of divergence among students in this study was in the extent to which they felt connected to their Lakota identity, and this was the case both in terms of their engagement with cultural activities and their self-reports of how connected they felt to their Lakota identity. While I asked students a number of questions about the ways that they engaged with aspects of their Lakota culture, I found that my positioning as a cultural outsider made it difficult to make meaningful sense of the varied responses that students gave. Consequently, I made the decision to rely exclusively on students' self-reports of how connected they felt to their Lakota identity, as opposed to attempting to differentiate students' connectedness to their Lakota identity based on the different ways that they engaged with aspects of the Lakota culture.

When looking across students' responses to how connected they felt to their Lakota identity, it became apparent that students varied widely in how connected they felt to their Lakota identity. In attempting to make sense of the factors that shaped students' connectedness with their Lakota identity, I found that students' reported connectedness to their Lakota identity tended to align with their perception of how the person who raised them viewed the Lakota culture. Those students who came from a home where they believed that the Lakota culture was strongly valued tended to feel strongly connected to their Lakota identity. Similarly, those students who reported that their Lakota culture was not emphasized at home tended to feel less connected and knowledgeable about their Lakota identity, regardless of which school they attended.

While the ways that students' culture was embraced in the home appeared to shape students' Lakota identity in predictable ways, there were no patterns by gender, grade, educational aspiration, occupational aspiration, or where they hoped to eventually live, that appeared to be related to how strongly an individual identified with their Lakota identity.

Given the centrality of students' Lakota identity to the design of this study, and the potential ways that students' Lakota identity may act as a protective factor in supporting their academic success (Lafromboise et al., 2006; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & Lafromboise, 2001), I was somewhat surprised that there was not a clear relationship between students' Lakota identity and their academic success. This does not mean that students' Lakota identity was unimportant or that these schools' efforts to embrace students' Lakota identity did not support students in meaningful ways. In fact, a number of students talked about feeling more at home in the school when their Lakota identity was emphasized. However, based on these students' responses, it does not appear that students' connectedness to their Lakota identity was a particularly important protective factor in explaining their academic success or their post-secondary aspirations.

Experiences with Racism and Discrimination

A final, but important, area of divergence among students in this study came in the way that they made sense of racism and discrimination. As previously noted, research has suggested that students' experiences with racism and discrimination may put their academic success at risk (Lafromboise et al., 2006; Ogbu, 1987). Given that these students were trying to find success in a place that the American Indian Movement dubbed, "the most racist state in the U.S.A." (Reinhardt, 2007), I assumed that racism and discrimination would pose significant risks to these students' academic success.

In terms of the extent to which students were exposed to the risks associated with racism and discrimination, my assumptions were correct. Most of the students in this study had experienced racism and discrimination first-hand and many believed that they would likely experience it again in the future. However, these students took very different perspectives on

how they sought to respond to this risk. For some students, racism and discrimination provided motivation to prove people wrong. In the following three examples from Keith, John, and Margaret, these students were very aware of the stereotypes that were held about the Lakota people, but for these students, this awareness gave them motivation to work hard to disprove such stereotypes.

> Keith (Bridgman): A lot of people I guess, think of us as savages still, and I don't like that. And the reason I'm trying to do good in school is to break that, like I don't want to be thought of as, you know, like horseback riding, teepee sleeping, you know? That's, I don't want to be thought of as that, I want to be thought of as someone who is smart and successful, you know?

> Interviewer: Do you think that race can be something that either helps people get ahead or holds people back?
>
> John (Bridgman): It could actually be both, like ya, cause there's a lot of issues that like kinda kept people on the rez too, like going off the rez, they had like a bunch of racial slurs or something at them, then ya. But ya, like then being a Lakota too makes me want to go out and show people that like we can be different and we can like achieve better things.

> Margaret (Rockwood): Stereotypes piss me off! I want to prove them wrong, like they make me so mad, like, I'm just tired of the image of what people think of Native Americans. Like, like, it's not like their fault that they're not like, they don't know, but some people seriously think we still live in teepees. Like, there's just ignorant questions like that, or like, or just, not being capable of doing something that we can do.

These three students differed in the amount of palpable anger and frustration they had regarding stereotypes, but they were all similar in their awareness of stereotypes and in their decision to use racism and discrimination as motivation to prove people wrong. For Margaret, racism and discrimination served as a source of anger that pushed her to do her best and to show people that Native Americans can be successful. As she stated, "Stereotypes piss me off! I want to prove them wrong." Margaret was determined to show people that Native Americans were capable of achieving whatever they set their mind to. For her, racism and discrimination were not going to compromise her success. Instead, they were going to push her to do her very best.

While other students expressed less anger about racism and discrimination, they were

equally motivated to show that they could be successful. As Keith noted, "A lot of people I guess, think of us as savages still, and I don't like that. And the reason I'm trying to do good in school is to break that… I want to be thought of as someone who is smart and successful, you know?" Keith felt a strong desire to disprove the stereotypes that he felt existed about his people, and he believed academic success was one of the best ways to accomplish that. Similarly, John expressed a desire to get off the reservation and to show people that the Lakota can achieve great things. For all three of these students, the motivation that they received from their experiences with racism and discrimination did not hold them back, but instead pushed them to do their best.

While motivation served to support the successes of students such as Keith, John, and Margaret, motivation was not the only productive response among students. To some students, racism and discrimination were not factors that supplied motivation, but instead were experiences that a person should be able to ignore. In the following example, Victor, a student at Rockwood, captures this idea, stating that discrimination was something that people should be able to just brush off.

> Victor (Rockwood): Ya, like racism in general, I don't see it as a huge problem, well from my perspective, cause when you hear, if you grew up right, you know to be able to just brush it off, cause you know the truth about you. You know it's not true.

Victor felt that because of the values his mother had instilled in him, and his own grounding in his Lakota identity, that he was able maintain a positive attitude in the face of any racism or discrimination he might experience. He knew the kind of person he was, and he was not going to let the words of others change that. From this perspective, racism and discrimination were simply aspects of life that were to be ignored, and more importantly, they were not viewed as factors that would impede his quest to reach his goals. In this way, his upbringing and connection to his Lakota identity acted as a protective factor against the risks that might have otherwise compromised his academic success.

To still other students, particularly those with a light complexion, they did not feel that racism would hold them back, largely because they did not believe that people would identify them as being Lakota. These students felt that their skin complexion was light enough that they would be viewed as white unless they made the decision to tell people otherwise. The following examples from Connie and Audrey capture how these students felt that their light skin might serve to protect them from discrimination.

> Connie (Aspen): I don't feel like I would be discriminated against, cause I mean, I am Native, but I am kind of light and stuff. And that's what my mom always jokes around about, but like if, I may not look Native, but I bet if people knew, then I probably would.

> Interviewer: You'd mentioned that racism and discrimination is a problem outside the reservation, is it something that worries you?
>
> Audrey (Aspen): No, most likely not, cause I'm white-skinned.

Although these students were proud of their Lakota identity and were not actively seeking to hide the fact that they were Lakota, they did feel that they would face less of a challenge navigating the barriers associated with racism and discrimination than others might face. As Connie plainly stated, "I don't feel like I would be discriminated against, cause I mean, I am Native, but I am kind of light and stuff." While she goes on to state that she likely would experience discrimination if people knew she was Native American, she felt protected from this risk factor as a result of her light skin complexion.

While these examples offer a variety of ways in which students sought to deal with racism and discrimination, it seems that there was a common thread throughout. These students had all developed perspectives on racism and discrimination that allowed them to maintain their educational goals and to believe that they were not going to be held back by the actions of others. These students' perspectives on racism and discrimination had acted as protective factors in the

face of the risks posed by racism and discrimination. While these students' responses to racism and discrimination differed, each of these perspectives allowed students to continue to strive for success and to believe that they were going to be able to overcome any future experiences with racism and discrimination. As a result, these students' perspectives on racism and discrimination not only supported their academic resilience, but they supported their future aspirations as well.

Conclusion

Although similarly high achieving, the students in this study varied greatly in the types of universities they aspired to attend. This variability in students' aspirations was particularly noteworthy given the similar locales, economic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, and grades that these students shared. In order to begin to make sense of these differences, I have spent this chapter looking at a number of aspects of students' lives outside of school.

Perhaps the most striking finding of this examination was the similarity in these students' lives outside of school. They all had strong support systems, all believed in the value of education, and all felt in control of their future. While these similarities did not explain why students had differing aspirations, they did serve as an important starting point in understanding the protective factors that supported these students' academic success. Each of these students maintained pro-schooling orientations that were reinforced by strong social supports in their lives, they all believed that education was going to help them achieve their goals, and they all felt their success was dependent on their own efforts.

Although the similarities in the social supports of these students helped ensure their academic success, it is not meant to imply that there was not also a tremendous amount of variability in these students' lives. These students differed in their views of what success would

look like for them, how they perceived the opportunities available to them on the reservation, how they viewed their Lakota identity, and how they made sense of racism and discrimination.

Despite these differences, there remained a common thread among these successful students. In all cases, these students were supported by protective factors that allowed them to either sidestep a potential risk factor, as in the case of using racism for motivation, or to completely disregard the existence of a risk factor, as in the case of those who did not expect to have to deal with racism because of their lighter skin complexion. These approaches served to protect students by consistently minimizing, or altogether eliminating, the risk factors that may have otherwise compromised their academic resilience. This insulation from the potential risk factors that they faced was likely one of the major reasons why these students were able to be academically successful.

This examination of students' lives outside of school has provided important insights into some of the protective factors that supported these students' academic success. However, this examination of students' experiences outside of school has not explained the ways that institutional factors within each of these schools supported students' success, nor have these out of school experiences explained the distinct variations that existed in students' post-secondary aspirations. In order to make sense of these differences, I now turn to an examination of students' experiences within their respective school.

CHAPTER VI

Rockwood School

While the results of Chapter Five provided an entry point in understanding the resilience of these students, their out of school experiences do not sufficiently explain the variation in students' aspirations, nor do they address the factors within schools that worked to support their success. Consequently, I now turn to an examination of the experiences of students within their respective schools.

As will become apparent in the next three chapters, although all three of these schools were similar in the fact that students had positive things to say about their schools, there were important differences in students' schooling experiences, differences that centered around students' overall perceptions of the academic expectations within their school, how valued they felt their Lakota culture was in the school, and how prepared they felt for college.

History

Catholic schools have traditionally been held in high regard for the quality education they provide for students from all minority and socioeconomic groups (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; O'Keefe & Scheopner, 2007). In fact, according to DeFiore (2006), these schools have traditionally demonstrated "the know-how to educate the poor and ethnic minorities in significant numbers" (p.110). However, this positive perspective on Catholic schools is much more complicated for the many Native Americans who were stripped of their culture in Catholic boarding schools.

As was discussed in Chapter Two, early efforts to educate Native Americans involved sending students to boarding schools where they would be stripped of their culture and taught the

"morals," lifestyle, and religion of white society. While Protestants founded many of the early boarding schools, the Catholic Church soon followed suit, seeking to spread Catholicism to the west (Galler Jr., 1998). Leading the Catholic educational mission were the Jesuits, a group of Catholics inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola, who emphasized education as a means for the care and development of the whole person, as well as a means through which individuals could become better able to serve others (Arrupe, 1994). As outlined in the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* (Pavur, 2005), Jesuit schools are intended to develop students both academically and spiritually, with an emphasis on students' moral, spiritual, and emotional development. Furthermore, the *Ratio Studiorum* dictates that this development should be accomplished through the use of teaching practices that emphasize caring relationships with students and the modeling of values that center on the good of society rather than one's self (Pavur, 2005).

While many Christian groups sought to spread their religion to the Native Americans, the Jesuits gained particular favor among the Lakota (Galler Jr., 1998). The Lakota appreciated the Jesuits' strict adherence to their educational and religious mission, as well as their willingness to adapt their teachings to the local culture. In the late 1870's, one of the Lakota chiefs requested that the federal government allow the Jesuits to set up a school on the Davenport Indian Reservation (Lakota, 2015). While this move was opposed by some within the tribe, as they did not want to lose their traditional ways, the chief believed that education was the best way to respond to the rapidly changing world around them, and he believed that the Jesuits would be the group best suited to offer an education that would allow them to maintain their traditional Lakota values (Lakota, 2015). Despite the Davenport Indian Reservation being designated as Episcopal territory, the request was granted. In the late 1880's, the Blessed Sacrament Mission School was established on the Davenport Indian Reservation.

Despite being founded at the request of a Lakota chief, students' experiences at Blessed Sacrament paralleled those of students at other boarding schools. Students' hair was cut, their language was banned, and they were disciplined in ways that were counter to traditional Lakota practices. It seems that despite the Lakota chief's effort to reach out to a group who purported a sincere interest in helping preserve the Lakota culture, these students' experiences were no different than those students who attended non-Jesuit boarding schools.

Over time, the school has changed. In the late 1960's, Blessed Sacrament was renamed Rockwood, in honor of the chief who helped establish it. According to the school's website, this name change was intended to symbolize the school's commitment to the development of students' Lakota identity and to represent the school's desire to move away from the assimilationist policies of the past. During the last half century, this evolution has continued, and Rockwood is now regarded as one of the finest schools on the Davenport Indian Reservation, a perspective that was expressed to me by students at all three schools.

While many students agreed that Rockwood offered a superior academic experience, the question remains as to what set the Rockwood educational experience apart from the opportunities available at Bridgman and Aspen.

Academic Experiences

During the 2013-2014 school year, Rockwood enrolled approximately 200 high school students, 70% of whom were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The teaching staff at the school was comprised of a mixture of Native American teachers and AmeriCorps volunteers, with the latter group being predominantly white and making up approximately two-thirds of the teaching staff. The stated mission of the school was to educate students' mind and spirit in both Lakota

and Catholic values, as well as to provide students with the academic skills necessary to matriculate into post-secondary institutions.

Laying the foundation for the high academic expectations within the classrooms of Rockwood were admissions requirements that ensured that all students were academically proficient. For a student to be admitted to Rockwood, they had to complete an admissions form, have a minimum GPA of 2.0 if they were transferring from another school, and achieve a score on the Rockwood admissions exam that was sufficient to indicate academic competence for the grade in which they were entering. Continued enrollment at Rockwood was contingent upon a student maintaining a 1.70 GPA at the end of their freshman year and attending tutoring if the school deemed it necessary.

As a result of admissions requirements that ensured that all students were academically prepared for the grade in which they were in, Rockwood did not offer a remedial academic track. Instead, all of the students at Rockwood were enrolled in courses that would push them to meet their academic potential and prepare them for college. As the following examples from Henry and Mindy illustrate, students felt that these courses pushed them to do their very best.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like they push you to do your best here?
>
> Henry (Rockwood): They push us beyond our limits!

> Interviewer: How would you describe Rockwood?
>
> Mindy (Rockwood): Pushy
>
> Interviewer: Pushy?
>
> Mindy (Rockwood): Ya.
>
> Interviewer: That's the first time I've heard pushy. What do you mean by that?
>
> Mindy (Rockwood): They push you to do good.

Interviewer: Ok, so would you say they hold high expectations?

Mindy (Rockwood): Ya, they don't really expect anything less.

Interviewer: Ok, is that different than what you experienced at Bridgman?

Mindy (Rockwood): Ya. Rockwood kind of helps you more. They like, if you have like 3 F's or something, then they draw their attention to you and help you and stuff, but, whereas at Bridgman it's on your own.

As Henry and Mindy make apparent, Rockwood students felt that they were pushed to do their academic best, with Henry going so far as to claim that students were pushed beyond their limits. While Mindy's description of the school as "pushy" reaffirms Henry's statement, her description of the school also sheds light onto the experiences of struggling students and adds insight into how the school was able to maintain high expectations for all students. Of particular note in Mindy's description is the way that the school was structured to support students who were falling behind. As Mindy notes, if a student had three failing grades, the school increased their attention on the student and provided them with additional support. This system, whereby the school systematically sought out struggling students in order to ensure that students received help getting caught up with their work, likely allowed teachers to continue to maintain the high expectations that students perceived as characterizing their academic experience.

Given the ways that Rockwood students felt pushed to do their best, they were convinced that not only was the education they were receiving the best that was available on the reservation, but that Rockwood was the only viable option to prepare them for college. In the following examples, Mary and Anthony capture this perspective, describing their decision to enroll at Rockwood and the ways in which this decision was shaped by their belief that Rockwood would prepare them for college in a way that no other school on the reservation could.

Interviewer: Ok, how'd you end up attending Rockwood?

> Mary (Rockwood): Umm, when I was in 8th grade, like I was comparing schools on where to go, cause I wanted to go Bridgman or Rockwood, and then as I saw that like Rockwood had more of an education wise, like they're known for education, so I was all like, I'm going to go there because I want to be able to go off to college and actually do something.
>
> Interviewer: Ok, how'd you end up attending Rockwood?
>
> Anthony (Rockwood): Oh, I don't know, specifically I wanted a really good education, like I wanted to be able to go to a really good college, and I hear that Rockwood is the only place that can offer that. People that go to Bridgman, their requirements are a lot lower, like really really low. There's people that go from junior year to Bridgman. They get moved up to senior and they graduate, and I'm pretty sure they're not ready for college. So ya, I don't know. And it's better than going to like Aspen or somewhere really far away, cause I still want to be able to sleep you know, so I was like ya, Rockwood seems like it's a really good place to get an education.

To both Mary and Anthony, attending Rockwood was a critical component of reaching their goal of attending college. Mary notes that she made the decision to attend Rockwood based on her long-term aspirations of going "off to college and actually doing something." Similarly, Anthony's statement, "I wanted to be able to go to a really good college, and I hear that Rockwood is the only place that can offer that," makes clear his perception that Rockwood would provide him with a superior academic experience relative to other schools on the reservation. Anthony goes on to justify this belief by sharing anecdotal accounts of students who transferred to Bridgman and were moved ahead a grade, a move that he believed hurt their college preparation.

While these are just two examples, they are representative of the general sentiment expressed to me by Rockwood students. Rockwood students were firm in their belief that their decision to attend Rockwood would offer them a college preparatory experience that was not available anywhere else on the reservation.

Students' confidence in their education was further bolstered by the many college mentorship programs that existed between Rockwood and universities throughout the region. In these partnerships, students were paired with a faculty advisor who offered help navigating the

application and scholarship process, offered insight into the academic programs at various schools, and served as a mentor after the student enrolled in college. The general sentiment about the value of these academic preparation efforts was captured in the following excerpt from my interview with Henry.

> Henry (Rockwood): I think one thing good here at Rockwood is they get you ready for college and they send you to college readiness programs.
>
> Interviewer: That seems to be a big thing here.
>
> Henry (Rockwood): Ya, cause here they just, they want the best for you basically.

This idea that the school wanted the best for them was discussed by most Rockwood students, and for some, such as Mary, the high academic expectations within the school served as a way to socialize them to the demands of college. The following excerpt from my conversation with Mary captures this perspective.

> Mary (Rockwood): Ya, they pile on the work a lot. I think it's like a good thing though that they have such high expectations and push us hard because then like it gets easier. And that's what I noticed like from the 8th grade middle school. You get like a lot of work and I thought it was really hard, but then it was like way easier my freshman year here, so I think it'd be the same way going into college.

As a result of believing that the school wanted the best for them, as well as believing that the school was providing them with a workload that was going to help them be prepared to meet the academic demands of college, students felt efficacious in their ability to be successful in college. Mary clearly believed that the effort she was putting in was going to prepare her for the workload that would await her when she entered college, a fact that not only allowed her to rationalize the effort she was putting in towards school, but also increased her confidence in her ability to succeed after high school. In the following example, Anthony echoes this confidence in his college preparation, stating that the school had put in more than sufficient time in preparing him for college.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like Rockwood has prepared you well for college?

Anthony (Rockwood): Ya. They put more than enough time into preparing us for college.

While the efforts of the school clearly supported the development of a college-going culture, it is important to recognize that these efforts were reinforced by the students themselves. As the following example from Raymond demonstrates, it was not just the high expectations within the school that pushed students to do their best, it was also the presence of a learning environment where students were pushed by their peers to succeed and where students were motivated to keep up with the college-going efforts of their friends.

Interviewer: So your close friends, or maybe just a little bit outside your close friends, what do they think about the importance of education?

Raymond (Rockwood): Umm, they, they like it, especially here at Rockwood. Everyone, I know a lot of my friends, they put in multiple applications at different colleges, so I mean I'm pretty sure they're very determined.

Interviewer: Ya. Do you think that has an influence on how you do in school?

Raymond (Rockwood): Yes, I mean. We're kind of, I guess a family you know. We each try to pull each other up, so when you see somebody getting a bunch of applications, it's kind of a drug, everybody else wants to get those in and get something for it.

While Raymond was speaking specifically about his friends, his emphasis on how things were "here at Rockwood" seemed to indicate that this socialization towards college-going was not limited to just his friends, but was instead a mindset that permeated throughout the school. To attend a school in which everyone was striving to be as successful as their peers was "kind of a drug," a fact that undoubtedly helped shape the uniformly high aspirations that Rockwood students exhibited. Raymond's perspective on the college-going culture of Rockwood closely aligned with the perspective offered by Anthony in Chapter Five, a Rockwood student who described his friends as, "challenging each other, like who's going to go the furthest, and who's going to go to the nicest college, and who's going to have the best grade and stuff like that." For these students, there was a high-degree of support and push from their peers in the college-going

process, a fact that served to reinforce the efforts of the teachers and administrators within the school.

A final, but important, way that students' confidence in their academic preparation was bolstered was through their knowledge of students who were currently at college and had reaffirmed to them their academic preparedness. Rockwood students' knowledge about the experience of their former peers came from both informal conversations with their friends, as well as structured opportunities designed to connect Rockwood alumni with current students. In both of these interactions, it was reaffirmed to students that the education they were receiving at Rockwood would leave them well prepared for college, a perspective captured in my conversation with Victor.

> Interviewer: Did you talk to people who were in the grades above you about their experiences at college?
>
> Victor (Rockwood): Still do.
>
> Interviewer: Have they felt academically prepared for what they encountered in school?
>
> Victor (Rockwood): Ya!

Not only did these positive affirmations from former students help the current students feel more efficacious and prepared for their future, it also seemed to help their buy-in to the high academic expectations within the school. These students never offered any sense of skepticism about the school's efforts to prepare them for college, nor did they complain that the workload was too hard or too much. In fact, their feelings were just the opposite. By seeing the school's efforts pay off in the way of successful peers, these students stood firmly behind the education they were receiving at Rockwood.

Taken together, it seems clear that Rockwood students felt very supported in their academic success. Students perceived their teachers as holding high expectations for students,

supports were in place to identify students who were struggling, students believed that the learning environment of the school pushed them to do their best, and the success of former students served to reinforce the value of the high academic expectations within the school. Through these efforts, the students at Rockwood felt very supported in their academic development and were confident in their ability to succeed in college.

Financial Preparation

While Rockwood's academic preparation helped students feel confident that they were receiving an education that would prepare them for academic success in college, there remained a concern for many students about how to pay for college. In a community where many families lived in extreme poverty, navigating the financial barriers to college was a formidable challenge. In the following examples, Mary and Margaret, discuss their concerns over paying for college.

> Interviewer: Do you worry about money at all?
>
> Mary (Rockwood): Umm, I worry about it a little bit, ya. Cause I got a few scholarships, but I know that I'm going to need to have a lot more than a few scholarships.

> Interviewer: Jumping back to the barriers question for a second, at one of the other schools I was at, they talked about money being a big barrier. And so you just mentioned scholarships, are you concerned about finances for college at all?
>
> Margaret (Rockwood): Ya. Thinking about this stuff makes my stomach hurt.
>
> Interviewer: Ya? Do you think it'll hold you back, or do you feel like you have a good plan?
>
> Margaret (Rockwood): I feel like it will kind of hold me back, because, Out-state University is an expensive school, and all these Ivy leagues are expensive schools. Like, Out-state is 50k a year. And scholarships, they're really competitive, especially the Gates' Millennium Scholarship. And that's a full ride, like I want that scholarship so bad, but I know, I know there's like a million other scholarships I can apply for. So, it's just, it's just like whether or not, if I apply to all these other scholarships, and I, just, I don't know. I don't want to take out loans, cause my aunt took out loans, and she's still paying for them. So…
>
> Interviewer: Ya. If you had to take out loans, do you think you would reevaluate what you're doing?
>
> Margaret (Rockwood): Ya, if I had, if I have to take out student loans, I know I'll have to like think like, if I want to go to this school or not. Or if, I don't know, I do think money's a huge issue. Cause I obviously don't have money saved. I don't have a college fund saved or anything. I wasn't like some Gerber baby.

For both Mary and Margaret, finances were a source of worry and a cause of stress. There was a fear of taking on debt and a recognition of the challenges they faced in financing their college education. As Margaret states, "I do think money's a huge issue. Cause I obviously don't have money saved. I don't have a college fund saved or anything. I wasn't like some Gerber baby." For Margaret, paying for college was a major challenge, and one that was at the core of how she thought about her future opportunities. If she was not able to navigate this potential barrier, she made it clear that it could potentially impact her ability to attend the school she was most interested in. This tug that Margaret felt towards lowering her aspirations is particularly noteworthy, as students who undermatch tend to be less likely to graduate from college and to have diminished occupational opportunities (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Horn & Carroll, 2006; Light & Strayer, 2000).

While Mary and Margaret's statements make clear the extent to which finances were viewed as a potential barrier to their success, perhaps equally important in their statements are their comments about earning scholarships. Both Mary and Margaret spoke of the importance of earning scholarships and both demonstrated an understanding of the scholarship process. Mary spoke of having already earned a few scholarships, while Margaret, who was a junior, spoke about how badly she wanted the Gates' Millennium Scholarship and her awareness of the "million other scholarships" available to her. While Margaret's knowledge of the importance of scholarships was in part due to the experiences of her own family members, most Rockwood students' emphasized the value of the support they received from the school in helping them learn about paying for college.

One of the primary ways that students learned about the scholarship process was through their "Gates' Class," a class designed around writing scholarship essays, particularly for the

Gates' Millennium Scholarship. This was a course that nearly all of the high-achieving seniors mentioned being enrolled in and was a course that students described as being extremely beneficial. In the following excerpt, Mary describes the "Gates' Class" and discusses the ways in which she felt the "Gates' Class" supported her efforts to attain scholarships.

> Interviewer: Anything else that you feel like was really useful in helping you figure out the whole college scholarship thing?
>
> Mary (Rockwood): The "Gates' Class," because Ryan McKenzie really helped us develop our structure, like with writing essays, and how like, to tell our perspective and not just like write about it. You want to like put emotion into it.
>
> Interviewer: That's excellent advice.
>
> Mary (Rockwood): Also, giving us time in school to work on that was helpful cause like I find it really hard for me to do something like, scholarship applications outside of school, but being able to have sometimes 1-on-1 with the teacher, and being able to get in scholarships is really huge and really good.

As a result of the support Mary received in crafting scholarship essays, as well as the opportunity to work on these scholarship essays in school, Mary spoke very highly of the ways in which the "Gates' Class" had supported her efforts to pay for college. While her concerns over paying for college lingered, as evidenced by her previously discussed statement of finances being a source of worry, it seems that the structured opportunities of the school worked to potentially lessen the barrier she faced in financing her college aspirations. Through the "Gates' Class," Mary was provided with the support she needed to apply for scholarships and was able to act in agentic ways in shaping her future.

While Mary's description of the "Gates' Class" makes apparent the value of a structured class designed around helping students navigate the financial barriers to college, this was not the only support that Rockwood students received. A number of Rockwood students singled out the support they had received from the school guidance counselor, Tiffany, as being particularly helpful in navigating the college-going process. The following examples capture the ways in which students spoke about the support they received from Tiffany.

Interviewer: Is it the classes like the "Gates' Class," is that what you found most helpful? Or what is it that helps with that?

Jill (Rockwood): Tiffany.

Interviewer: Tiffany?

Jill (Rockwood): Tiffany, and well ya, the "Gates' Class," he would also give us information on scholarships.

Interviewer: Are there other things that you feel like the school can do that's important for me to think about in helping you be successful?

Victor (Rockwood): Ya. Offering support. Tiffany does that a lot. I mean like she gives you support, she encourages you to like apply for summer programs if you're not doing anything for the summer.

This support on the part of Tiffany is particularly important to note, as counselors have been identified by a number of researchers as being critical in helping students find post-secondary success (Astramovich & Harris, 2007; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007; McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

At Rockwood, it seems that Tiffany, who, in addition to acting as a guidance counselor, was the "Director of Student Advancement," took on the role of helping students navigate the college-going process by guiding them through the scholarship process and by helping them enroll in college preparation programs in the summer. As Victor notes, her proactive approach to helping him enroll in college preparation programs was one of the key components to his success. For Victor, Tiffany was not just another source of support; she was a key figure in empowering him and helping him find success.

Other students spoke positively about Tiffany for her efforts in helping them enroll in summer programs such as Upward Bound and Gear Up, two federal programs designed to support students' post-secondary success. Through her efforts, Tiffany helped students navigate the barriers that they faced in the college-going process and helped them gain agency over their own direction in life.

As is evident from these examples, students' support in the college-going process was not limited to a singular activity within the school. Instead, students felt that their teachers, counselors, and mentors continually supported them in their college-going efforts. Students believed that were given the academic skills that would be necessary for them to succeed in college, and they were given support in navigating the financial barriers associated with college. As a result, these students held high aspirations for their futures, and most were confident in their ability to achieve their goals. As I look across the differences in students' aspirations in the following chapters, it will be important to keep in mind the ways that students believed that Rockwood actively helped them navigate the potential risk factors to their success, and the ways that students' post-secondary aspirations were shaped by processes within the school.

Affirming Students' Lakota Identity

In emphasizing the myriad ways that the school sought to help students find academic success and prepare them for college, both academically and financially, it is important to recognize that the school did this while working towards a second aspect of their educational mission, helping students maintain and affirm their Lakota identity. As the following excerpts from Margaret and Derek illustrate, the maintenance of students' Lakota identity was a central component of their educational experience at Rockwood.

> Interviewer: Describe your school for me.
>
> Margaret (Rockwood): I think Rockwood is a great school. They, they have their own "Gates' Class." Like they want you to like, if you don't go to college it's kinda weird, you have to do something after high school. If you don't do something, it's just, what are you going to do with your life? They kind of like establish like a plan. I mean we are a college prep school, so I would expect it. And with the like, the Lakota, Catholic, Jesuit part, it just kind of helps us like find our morals and values, and find kind of like who we are…I don't know, I just, I think Rockwood's great!
>
> Interviewer: So what words you use to describe Rockwood?

> Derek (Rockwood): Hmm, I'd say…they're pushing the, their students to do as best as they can. Get good grades, go to college, and at the same time, umm, maintaining their Lakota identity.

These excerpts from Margaret and Derek represent just a sampling of the positive ways that students described Rockwood's efforts to affirm and maintain their Lakota identity and help them further develop their morals and values. For both of these students, the school's emphasis on their Lakota identity appeared to be on even footing with the school's emphasis on academics. As Derek states, Rockwood is focused on students, "Get[ing] good grades, go[ing] to college, and at the same time…maintaining their Lakota identity." Derek's use of "at the same time" indicates that he viewed the school's emphasis on students' Lakota identity as being in balance with their emphasis on academics.

Similarly, when Margaret discussed the fact that the school is a college prep school, she immediately followed her discussion of the school's academics by making note of the fact that the school is a "Lakota, Catholic, Jesuit" school and the way that this shaped the development of her morals and values. As was the case with Derek, this immediate and parallel discussion of the religious aspect of the school indicates a belief that the development of her Lakota identity was nearly as central to her schooling experience as her academics.

In order to understand why students' perceived the maintenance and development of their Lakota identity as being central to their educational experience, it is worth describing the many ways that students' Lakota identity was emphasized within the school.

The most apparent way that this emphasis on students' Lakota identity was articulated was through the offering of Lakota-specific courses that all students were required to take. These courses included, "Lakota History and Culture," "Lakota Singing," "Lakota Sacred Stories," and "Lakota Language." In addition to these course offerings, students' Lakota identity was affirmed

in a number of symbolic and performative ways throughout the school. For example, students were required to speak Lakota to leave the classroom, the core Lakota Values of generosity, courage, respect, and wisdom were posted in the classrooms and hallways of the school, students had the opportunity to attend *Inipi*[6] on the grounds of the school, and students could participate in extra-curricular opportunities that centered on traditional Lakota activities, such as attending a buffalo kill ceremony or joining a drum circle.

Given the many ways that Rockwood sought to embrace students' Lakota identity, students expressed a belief that Rockwood was actively working to integrate aspects of their Lakota identity into all parts of the school day, a perspective captured in the following excerpts from Mindy and Jill.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like your culture is valued within the school?
>
> Mindy (Rockwood): Ya.
>
> Interviewer: How do you see it being valued?
>
> Mindy (Rockwood): Like Rockwood's big on it. Like they have a singing class, and always do things, like a couple weeks ago we had a hand game tournament during lunch.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like your culture is valued within the school?
>
> Jill (Rockwood): Yes.
>
> Interviewer: Ya? And in what ways is it valued?
>
> Jill (Rockwood): Umm, just the, like everyone has a general knowledge of it, like the values and the teachings, and that it's, it's incorporated in my classes.
>
> Interviewer: Can you speak a little more on that and the different ways that it might be incorporated?
>
> Jill (Rockwood): Umm, well like last year in my, like the one I can remember right now, my ethics class, we were talking about like relationships and everything, and how they're viewed in the church and then how they're viewed in the Lakota culture. And things like that, or like how the church views life and how the Lakota culture views life, so things like that where even if it's like a little lesson or something, they incorporate it. Or like in my current events class, we would talk about things like nationally, or globally, and then locally, like the reservation and stuff like that.

[6] Often referred to as sweat, Inipi is an opportunity for physical and emotional rejuvenation.

As is made clear by both Jill and Mindy, the school's efforts to embrace students' Lakota identity spanned a range of activities that could encompass almost any aspect of the school day. At times, students would see their Lakota identity being reaffirmed through the performative aspects of their culture, such as speaking the language or singing the "Flag Song." At other times, this emphasis on affirming students' Lakota identity involved playing handgames, a traditional Native American guessing game, and at still other times, this emphasis on affirming students' Lakota identity was enacted in the academic mission of the school as teachers worked to discuss events in the community and how these events fit into what was occurring at the national and global level. The cumulative result of these efforts was students believing that the school and all of its teachers, both Native and non-Native, valued their Lakota identity.

Before discussing the extent to which students believed that the school's efforts to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity supported their academic success, it is worth making note of the fact that Rockwood students were nearly unanimous in their belief that all of their teachers, both white and Lakota, valued their Lakota identity. This is not a trivial point when one considers the historical and socio-political context of the school and of the reservation as a whole. For these students, the issue of the teacher's race appeared to be of little importance. In the following example, Henry responds to my inquiry about the impact of the white teachers' efforts to embrace his Lakota identity. As Henry's response makes clear, through the white teachers' efforts to show that they cared about students' Lakota identity, these teachers were not only accepted by students, but they were generally held in high regard.

> Henry (Rockwood): I don't see them as like any other like white person I guess. They're like more caring and they really want to dive into our like culture and want to learn more from it. I guess like, they're kind of educating themselves while teaching.

By seeing his Lakota identity embraced in the classroom, Henry felt very positively about his AmeriCorps teachers, and in his words, viewed them as being different than "any other…white person." While Henry's comment indicates skepticism about the ways that white people view Native Americans in the surrounding communities, in the classrooms of Rockwood, he believed he was being taught by white people who were different. These teachers genuinely cared about him and wanted to see him succeed. Consequently, he viewed them very positively.

While most students did not talk about the race of the teacher in quite as explicit of ways as Henry, the students' responses did make it clear that the race of their teachers was not getting in the way of them developing positive relationships with their teachers. In fact, as the following excerpts from my conversations with Raymond, Jill, and Victor indicate, when asked to describe Rockwood, students often spoke first about the relationships they had with their teachers and the warm environment in which they learned.

> Interviewer: Can you describe Rockwood for me as a school?
>
> Raymond (Rockwood): It's a great school actually. It's a little small, I mean I've come from like bigger schools and they're more, I don't know how to say, uhh, a little more broad. They don't really focus on students as well, cause they're more big, but I mean here, a lot of the teachers, they'll go one-on-one with the student if they need to, and they'll help them and it's just, I think it's a really great environment and good school altogether.

> Interviewer: What kind of words you use to describe Rockwood as a school?
>
> Jill (Rockwood): Hmm, I kinda think of family.
>
> Interviewer: Ya?
>
> Jill (Rockwood): Just cause of like the support and everything from everyone, like both with school and like personally.

> Interviewer: What words would you use to describe Rockwood as a school?
>
> Victor (Rockwood): Hmm, home. Family. Supportive.

In their efforts to describe the school, both Victor and Jill utilized the words "family" and "support," while Raymond talked about teachers being willing to go one-on-one with students and helping them as much as they needed. While Raymond did not use the words "family" or "support," his description of the school clearly pointed to a strong sense of academic support and care within the school, a fact that to him stood in stark contrast to the schools he had attended outside of the reservation.

Of particular note in Jill's statement is the fact there was "support and everything from everyone, like both with school and like personally." Jill's statement made no mention of race. Instead, her use of "everyone" made it clear that she believed that all students and teachers in the school cared about one another and had positive relationships with one another, regardless of race. Other students' descriptions of the entire school as a family seemed to implicitly reaffirm the notion that there were positive relationships between all teachers and students in the school.

It is important to recognize that this absence of discussion about race was occurring in a school environment where the majority of the teaching staff was white and most of the teachers grew up far away from the Davenport Indian Reservation, with little prior knowledge of the Lakota culture. Yet the students at Rockwood made no distinction amongst their teachers. These teachers were part of the school "family" and not "like any other white person."

While it may seem as though I am belaboring this point, understanding how students made sense of the school's efforts to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity cannot be done without understanding the learning environment within the school. It is therefore critical to recognize that efforts to maintain and affirm students' Lakota identity were occurring in

classrooms in which students felt that all of their teachers valued their Lakota identity and in classrooms where students had positive relationships with all of their teachers.

Given the uniformity with which students believed that both the school and the teachers valued and promoted their Lakota identity, there was a considerable amount of divergence in terms of how students made sense of the academic implications of these efforts. In the following examples, Victor, Derek, and Patricia offer three distinct ways in which students made sense of the school's efforts to incorporate their Lakota culture into the curriculum. In order to contextualize these excerpts, it should be noted that when these students were asked how strongly they identified with their Lakota identity, all three of these students stated that it was very important to them.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like that helps your education when you see your culture valued in the school?
>
> Victor (Rockwood): Umm, ya. It's always good to have knowledge, but on top of that, being able to know about your own past, and being able to connect that to your future.
>
> Interviewer: Ya, do you enjoy those classes more than classes where your culture isn't present?
>
> Victor (Rockwood): Uhh, ya. And then, well being able to know that and then if you go out in the world, and spark a conversation with a friend. Like to be able to refer to your history of your own culture and being able to give them your perspective instead of from the white textbooks.

> Interviewer: Do you find it easier for you to learn or be motivated in those classes when it's like about your own culture and people, or it doesn't really make a difference?
>
> Derek (Rockwood): I don't know if it's because I've just become so used to it, it just seemed like another class. Like, I'm going to do well in it, but then at the same time, I'm learning about my culture. I see it in the same sense how in physics I'm learning about how the world works. I'm learning about how like my tradition has been.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like seeing the way that your culture is valued, do you think that helps your education? Or does it not make a difference?
>
> Patricia (Rockwood): Hmm, I don't even think it makes a difference.
>
> Interviewer: What about in like your Lakota language classes, does that make you more excited or motivated to learn? Or it's just another class?

> Patricia (Rockwood): I think like I'm really excited to actually learn about it. I never really cared my freshman year until at least like second semester going into my sophomore year when I met Rita and she was like all big on it and telling us these like stories and everything.

For these three students, the value of the school's efforts to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity in the curriculum was quite different, and in some ways, different than what might be expected based on their similarly strong connections to their Lakota identity. For Victor, the inclusion of information related to his Lakota identity was providing him with the skills and knowledge that would allow him to teach people outside of the reservation about the Lakota people, knowledge that could potentially serve as a buffer to what he might encounter away from the reservation. In this sense, it seems that he viewed the inclusion of aspects of his Lakota identity in a very positive light.

For Derek, efforts to embrace his Lakota identity in the classroom were not seen as something that made a tremendous difference to his learning. Derek viewed the presence of his Lakota culture as so ubiquitous that he saw it as just another class. Derek seemed to have confidence that he could be successful no matter what, and he viewed the inclusion of his Lakota culture in the classroom as simply an object of study, akin to physics.

The third example, from Patricia, exemplifies the disconnect that often existed between how students spoke in neutral terms about the way the inclusion of aspects of their Lakota culture impacted their academic performance, but then spoke very positively about its impact on their interest and motivation. In one sentence she states, "I don't even think it makes a difference," while in her next statement, she talks about being "really excited to actually learn about it." This disconnect was not specific to Patricia, but was actually fairly common among all students in this study. It was unclear if these students did not think this increased motivation led

to better grades, or if their belief about what impacted their grades was focused on factors outside of motivation.

In making sense of these diverging perspectives, it seems that while some students saw a direct benefit between the school's efforts to embrace their Lakota identity and their academic success, others saw little academic value in it. For Victor, for whom the academic and cultural goals of the school worked in tandem, efforts to incorporate his Lakota identity into the curriculum almost certainly supported his development into an academically successful student and a person who felt confident in his ability to leave the reservation and share his Lakota culture with others.

For other students, such as Derek and Patricia, the academic impact of the school's efforts to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity was less apparent. However, that is not to say that the school was not successfully meeting their goals of promoting academic excellence and affirming students' Lakota identity. In fact, both of these students were academically successful, and both had self-identified as feeling strongly connected to their Lakota identity. While these factors did not work in tandem in the way that they had for Victor, there was little doubt that Rockwood was successfully providing them with an education that emphasized academic excellence, college-going, and the maintenance and affirmation of their Lakota identity.

Conclusion

Students at Rockwood tended to be extremely satisfied with their educational experience. They felt that their Lakota identity was valued in the school, and they felt that they were pushed to do their academic best. In addition to feeling pushed and supported by all of their teachers,

these students reported a high-degree of academic and financial preparedness for college and demonstrated a clear understanding of the college-going process.

The positive views by students about their academic preparation were likely due in part to the high degree of coherence that existed around the school's academic aims. The school's mission and organization were designed around the aims of providing an academic experience that prepared students for college, and the teachers enacted this curriculum in an environment designed to support students' success. The result, a group of students who felt pushed to do their best and confident that they would have the academic base needed to be successful in college.

In addition to helping students feel academically prepared for college, the school also worked to ensure that students were able to navigate the financial barriers associated with college. The school accomplished this by offering classes focused on scholarships and by developing mentorship programs with universities in the region. There were also individuals within the institution who were singled out for helping students find success, particularly the counselor, Tiffany. In line with the mission of the school, Tiffany embraced her role as an individual who could help students gain the agency to determine their future possibilities in life. Although she was singled out, Tiffany was clearly not acting on her own; she was supported by the structures within the school that helped students navigate barriers to their success, a fact that supported her in her efforts towards empowering students.

In addition to the school's academic mission, Rockwood sought to embrace students' Lakota and Catholic identities. With regard to students' Lakota identity in particular, the school acknowledged its value in a number of ways, including hanging posters in the hallways, offering a number of Lakota specific classes, and providing students with the opportunity to engage in

traditional Lakota activities. Perhaps most importantly, students' Lakota identity was embraced in the classroom. Students were required to speak Lakota to leave their classrooms, and this was the case regardless of the race of the teacher. Similarly, teachers integrated conversations about Lakota beliefs and local issues into their classroom discussions. While students differed in terms of how much they felt that this emphasis on their Lakota identity impacted their education, there was little doubt that the barrier that may have existed due to the incongruence between the cultural identity of the student and the culture of the classroom was significantly diminished due to a concerted effort by both the school and the teachers to maintain and affirm students' Lakota identity.

In summary, by creating a system in which the academic mission, norms, and structures of the school were aligned with the goals and actions of the teachers and counselors, Rockwood was able to create an environment that students' perceived as supportive of their academic success and one that helped them navigate many of the barriers that previous researchers have suggested may hold them back. As will be seen in Chapters Seven and Eight, this level of alignment among the principles of the school and the actions of the teachers was far from the norm.

CHAPTER VII

Bridgman School

Located less than ten miles from Rockwood was Bridgman School, a federally operated, Bureau of Indian Education School. While both Rockwood and Bridgman had similar histories of oppression and cultural violence, the experiences of students at these two schools during the 2013-2014 school year were markedly different.

Founded in the 1870's, the Lakota Training School was established by the Office of Indian Affairs to educate students in English and to help the Lakota make "rapid progress towards civilization" (Lakota, 2015). This boarding school housed and educated roughly the same number of students as Rockwood School, though rather than being run by the Jesuits, this school was operated by the federal government.

In the government's efforts to "civilize" the Lakota, the Lakota Training School placed a heavy emphasis on student discipline, the removal of traditional Lakota practices, and the development of agricultural skills among the Lakota. Annual reports from the school indicate that for men, measures of success included whether they learned English, worked, were members of the church, attended dances, and engaged in ranching activities. For women, successful educational outcomes meant that the women had clean homes, wore "citizens' clothes," belonged to sewing societies, used beds, and used tables (Lakota, 2015). In other words, the Lakota Training School sought to strip students of their Lakota identity in the hopes of assimilating them into a very particular version of European American society.

Over time, the school has changed, both in name and mission. Since the middle of the 20th century, there has been a strong effort on the part of the school and the community to move away from the cultural imperialism that characterized the experiences of students at the Lakota Training School and towards an educational experience that values and promotes the Lakota culture. This effort is reflected on the school's website, which notes that the Bridgman School Board, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Lakota Nation, and the Office of Indian Education Programs are collectively committed to preserving the Lakota language and Lakota culture of students at Bridgman.

By explicitly acknowledging their past, the school has been able to frame their educational mission in such a way that supports their continued efforts to move towards a more culturally appropriate education for students within the community. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss students' descriptions of what this education looked like, how students made sense of their experiences within the school, and how students thought about the long-term implications of their experiences at Bridgman.

Academic Experiences

During the 2013-2014 school year, Bridgman School was a public K-12 school operated by the Bureau of Indian Education. It was located in a town of less than 20,000 people on the Davenport Indian Reservation. The high school served approximately 450 students from the town and surrounding areas. Consistent with their effort to move away from the assimilationist policies of the past, Bridgman's educational mission was to create life-long learners who were grounded in their Lakota identity and who sought to improve the well-being of themselves, their family, and their community.

In order to understand students' experiences at Bridgman, I asked students to describe their school for me. As the following examples from Tasha, Theresa, and Linda illustrate, sports were often at the forefront of how students thought about their school.

Interviewer: How would you describe Bridgman?

Tasha (Bridgman): Hmm, sports oriented.

Interviewer: What words would you use to describe Bridgman as a school?

Theresa (Bridgman): It's a good school, but they kinda care about basketball too much.

Interviewer: So how would you describe Bridgman as a school?

Linda (Bridgman): Umm, I think it's a more sports school.

Interviewer: And you said community earlier, also?

Linda (Bridgman): Ya, it's like a community. It's a sports school. Umm, I mean, everybody is proud to be a Bridgman Raider. I mean everybody. Everybody wants to be a Raider, everybody wants to be part of Bridgman athletics, everybody. And umm, ya, it is, it's good to be, you know, part of a good team. You seen the trophy cases, you've see all of it, umm, but you rarely see anybody graduating from here…And they live in this high school dream, like I was the best, I was the best at LNI. I was the best at state, you know? Blah, blah, blah, made state tourney, whatever. But, you know, you could break a limb and never walk again, but you'll always have your brain, you know?

The statements from these students make apparent just how valued athletics were within the school. The school's orientation towards sports brought a sense of identity to the school and students indicated that it was a source of pride within the community. As Linda noted, "everybody wants to be part of Bridgman athletics, everybody." This sentiment was echoed in numerous interviews, particularly with members of the basketball team. For example, when I asked John how he ended up at Bridgman, sports were the deciding factor.

Interviewer: How did you end up here?

John (Bridgman): Umm, sports.

Interviewer: Sports?

John (Bridgman): Ya, they, they had like a very, or a real good team like for football and basketball, and then like I always wanted to play on the best team.

While John was very happy to be a member of the Bridgman athletic teams, many students felt that the school put too much emphasis on sports. As Theresa noted, "it's a good school, but they kinda care about basketball too much." Theresa indicated that this emphasis on sports took away from the academics of the school. Other students, such as Erica, expanded on this idea, discussing the way that the school's emphasis on sports hindered her learning.

> Erica (Bridgman): We get behind when they come back, we have to…actually go back for them, and so, during classes, we're just like bored out of our minds because we had to go back for the basketball players.

As a result of this school-wide emphasis on basketball, these students felt that their learning was at times hindered by their teachers' efforts to ensure that the basketball players remained eligible and caught up on their work.

While Linda noted that "everybody wants to be part of Bridgman athletics," she echoed Theresa and Erica's belief that the school cared too much about basketball. As Linda stated, "You seen the trophy cases, you've see all of it, umm, but you rarely see anybody graduating from here." Linda questioned the value of high school stardom if it came at the cost of not receiving an education that prepared students for life after college. In her words, "They live in this high school dream, like I was the best, I was the best at LNI. I was the best at state, you know? …But, you know, you could break a limb and never walk again, but you'll always have your brain, you know?" Despite the source of pride that sports were to the community, Linda believed that there were much more important things that the school and the students should be focusing on to ensure their success in the future.

Linda's concerns about the academic expectations of the school were largely supported by Bridgman's graduation rates and standardized test score data. The four-year graduation rate at Bridgman during the 2011-2012 school year was less than 40% (Lakota, 2015). Additionally,

during the 2011-2012 school year, only 26% of Bridgman students scored proficient or higher in reading and 9% scored proficient or higher in math. However, it should be noted that these scores do represent a 6-percentage point increase from the previous year in students scoring at least proficient in reading and a 5-percentage point increase in students scoring at least proficient in math. The 2011-2012 four-year gradation rate was also a 16-percentage point increase over the 2010-2011 four-year graduation rate (Lakota, 2015). In other words, while students at Bridgman were not graduating at a high rate or scoring as high on standardized exams as would be hoped, there was reason for optimism about the direction in which the school was heading.

While the school appeared to be heading in the right direction, many students at Bridgman expressed a belief that they were not yet getting as much out of their education as they should. As the following excerpts illustrate, there was genuine concern among students about the academic expectations of the school and the implications that these low expectations would have on their ability to be successful in college.

> Interviewer: Have you had any experiences in the school, whether with teachers, friends, or someone else, that you feel like has kept you from meeting your goals?
>
> Keith (Bridgman): Ya, in some classes I feel like I didn't learn as much as I was supposed to, or like as I should have. So that, you know, I don't really know much about that subject I guess. And I should have learned more, and that's one thing that should, or that's probably keeping me back.

> Linda (Bridgman): You rarely see anybody going to college from here…Bridgman doesn't focus on academics more than, they don't focus on that at all actually. They don't push our senior class.

> John (Bridgman): Academically we ain't prepared…like we might not have heard of stuff that the college might pull out on us, and might not have too much knowledge of it, and we might like get down on ourselves…
>
> Interviewer: Ya? Why do you think that is, that you wouldn't have heard of some of that stuff?
>
> John (Bridgman): Cause umm, I don't know, there's just like, cause we have students coming back that are already at college, and they're like, ya, I wish we did this cause I saw that in college and I didn't know nothing about it.

All three of these students raised serious concerns about their academic preparedness for college and the extent to which they were pushed to be academically successful. For Keith, there was a recognition that he was not getting as much as he should out of his classes and he was aware of the way that this may limit his future success, noting, "that's probably keeping me back." However, the tone of his comments almost seemed resigned to accepting the fact that a limited academic push was just going to be part of his educational experience. This feeling of resignation was not apparent in Linda or John's statement. Linda was highly critical of the academic preparation she had received, quite plainly stating, "they don't push our senior class." Linda believed this lack of academic push was central to understanding the lack of Bridgman students who enrolled in college. Similarly, John noted his concern over the possibility of not being familiar with the topics and concepts he might encounter in college, a fact that he was worried may cause he and his peers to feel less about themselves and their academic preparation. For these students, there was a genuine concern about the potential academic struggles that they might experience as a result of the lack of academic preparation that they felt they had received at Bridgman.

While students were fairly consistent in believing that they were not being pushed in the way that they should, they differed in their explanation as to why this was occurring, with some students blaming their teachers and others blaming their peers. In the following three excerpts, Theresa, Keith, and Merlin describe the former perspective, expressing a belief that a number of teachers within the school simply did not care enough to push students to do their best.

> Interviewer: Are there teachers that you feel like are not so good, or that you feel like keep you from meeting your goals?
>
> Theresa (Bridgman): Umm, well when I was in my 11th grade, umm, literature. There was this one teacher, we didn't do so much work in there, and umm, like, I thought it was kind of like fun because we didn't

really do anything. And umm, I don't know, it didn't help me in the long run though, because like I struggled the first part of my English 12 class.

Keith (Bridgman): Some teachers are just here for the money, and you can tell because they do a half-ass job, and they, they don't, they don't help kids I guess.

Merlin (Bridgman): There's some teachers that are like, really helpful, and nice, and outgoing and helpful. Like interactive with the students, but some are really, ain't like, they'll just give them an assignment, explain it to them, if they ain't paying attention then that's their fault.

From the perspective of Theresa, Keith, and Merlin, there were teachers in the school who simply did not put in the effort that was necessary in order to ensure that all of their students were successful. Theresa talked about being allowed to just hang out in the classroom, while Keith described some teachers as just being there for the money, putting in only a half-hearted effort and being unwilling to help students. Similarly, Merlin described teachers who he perceived as failing to provide students with adequate support, positioning them as being the opposite of those teachers who were "nice" and "helpful." To all three of these students, the lack of academic expectations within the school were at least in part due to a lack of effort on the part of their teachers.

In contrast to the perspectives of Theresa, Keith, and Merlin, other students expressed a belief that while many of the teachers tried their best, their success was hindered by the efforts of students within the school.

Erica (Bridgman): They [teachers] like push me to be better than anything… it's just like, some of the kids that come here that make it seem bad.

Linda (Bridgman): I'm taking Ring's class. Ring is our English teacher, and ya he prepares us, but he has to slow it down for some people, because some people aren't used to that. Some people don't understand, you know, papers are due today, and if they're not, they're zeroes…So it's like, like why even prepare us, because you know, there's people still trying to hold us back, you know? And it's like, it's really frustrating and you know, couple weeks later, oh can I turn this in? And everybody's like, why are we trying to go over that now, we already turned it in like two weeks ago?

From these students' perspectives, the lack of academic expectations within the school had less to do with their teachers' efforts and more to do with the actions and behaviors of their peers. As Linda noted when discussing Mr. Ring, "He prepares us, but he has to slow it down for some people, because some people aren't used to that. Some people don't understand, you know, papers are due today, and if they're not, they're zeroes." In the eyes of Linda and Erica, despite their teachers' best efforts, their peers' actions often did not support the development of a successful learning environment.

Based on these students' descriptions, it seems that the efforts, or lack thereof, on the part of both teachers and students at Bridgman worked to create a learning environment that was characterized by low academic expectations and a lack of support on the part of the teachers.

As a consequence of the low expectations within the school, many of these high-achieving students perceived their academic success as being dependent on their own effort. As the following examples illustrate, Bridgman students believed that their success depended largely upon their willingness to take ownership over their actions and their learning. If they chose not to take on this ownership, they would be allowed to flounder.

> Interviewer: How would you describe Bridgman as a school?
>
> Mallory (Bridgman): Bridgman as a school. I think it's a good school, but there's a lot of things that they can improve on. I like that there's really nice teachers and there's really nice people here, and like they try to push you to do stuff, but I think they can push us harder. Cause like the teachers give you homework, but it's not something they push, like you don't have to do it if you don't want to, and ya…

> Interviewer: How would you describe Bridgman as a school?
>
> Melvin (Bridgman): I'd say Bridgman is like, it's a good school, like, but if you don't want to work, you don't have to. I know like, they won't make you like, they won't tell you and like punish you for it…If you want to slack off, they won't really enforce you. It's your problem, you're gonna fail, you know?

> Interviewer: Do you feel prepared for college?

> Bobby (Bridgman): Ya, I feel pretty prepared. Here, I guess, here it just depends on the kid, if the kid wants to go and work hard for it. If you just sit there and not get involved with the classes here, then you don't learn nothing.

The descriptions of Bridgman offered by Mallory, Melvin, and Bobby were quite different than what was seen at Rockwood. At Rockwood, all of the students felt pushed to do their best by all of the teachers, and no one expressed a sense that their success was dependent on whether they took the initiative to be successful. At Bridgman, a number of students spoke of the importance of the student taking ownership of their education and doing what they could, "to go and work hard for it." The prevailing view at Bridgman seemed to be that success "just depends on the kid" and that your success is "your problem." All three of these students seemed to accept this notion of individual responsibility, were comfortable in taking ownership of their success, and gave no indication that the efforts on the part of the school played a significant role in their success.

While there is certainly something to be gained by helping students develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for their outcomes, John's earlier statement that, "we have students coming back…and they're like, ya, I wish we did this cause I saw that in college and I didn't know nothing about it," calls into question the extent to which Bridgman students truly had the opportunity to determine their own success. Even if students were able to take ownership over their efforts and actions within the classroom, they could only make the most of the opportunities placed in front of them, opportunities that Bridgman alumni had indicated were not sufficient to prepare them academically for college.

Financial Preparation

While students at Bridgman expressed concern over their academic preparation for college, it was not the only factor shaping how they thought about their post-secondary

aspirations. In fact, for many students, it was not even the most important factor. At Bridgman, where 100% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, finances were often at the center of students' post-secondary decision-making. As the following excerpts from Merlin and Keith illustrate, a number of Bridgman students stated quite plainly that finances were the deciding factor in where they intended to enroll for college.

> Interviewer: Some people have mentioned money as a barrier, is that a concern at Out-State Tribal College?
>
> Merlin (Bridgman): Umm, no, umm, at Out-State Tribal College it's actually, one of the reasons we're going down there, cause it has free tuition for Native American students. So that's one of the good things. We can go down there and like try it out, cause it'll be economically helpful. Then if, maybe if we don't like it, we can try a different college. But just to like, freshman year, just so we'll like start getting scholarships and like try to get the hang of college.

> Interviewer: Why do you think that people end up going off [to college], but not finding success?
>
> Keith (Bridgman): Could be money problems. Pretty sure that's why half the graduating class is trying to go to tribal colleges is money problems.

These examples from Merlin and Keith illustrate not only the concern over college finances that existed among students at Bridgman, but also the educational path that many students were taking to overcome this barrier. As Merlin notes, one of the reasons that he and his friends chose to attend a tribal college is, "[be]cause it has free tuition for Native American students." While Merlin was talking about he and his friends specifically, Keith speculated that this logic applied to the senior class as a whole, stating, "Pretty sure that's why half the graduating class is trying to go to tribal colleges is money problems."

While the examples from Merlin and Keith make evident the ways that finances shaped students' college aspirations, the conversation I had with Tasha made it clear that even if the initial obstacles of paying for college were overcome, finances could continue to act as an enduring barrier to the pursuit of one's goals and aspirations. In my conversation with Tasha, she

initially expressed to me her desire to be a pediatrician. However, later in the same conversation, she told me that she wanted to be a nurse. When I asked her to explain this change, I learned that money was at the root of this vacillation.

> Tasha (Bridgman): I'm probably going to be a nurse, hopefully, figure that out and ya, I wouldn't mind being a nurse.
>
> Interviewer: Now, so, what made the change there? Just a little bit ago you said you want to be a pediatrician.
>
> Tasha (Bridgman): Well because whenever I was in the research apprentice program, and talking to like the college students there that are in med school, and its like hearing how much it does cost…it's like kind of scary.

While Tasha indicated that she "wouldn't mind being a nurse," her use of "wouldn't mind" seemed to indicate that this proposed career trajectory was more of an effort to find a financially plausible educational path than it was a sincere desire to become a nurse. The idea of taking on added debt was scary to her and not something that she felt comfortable doing. In this way, money became central to how she constructed her aspirations.

At a school where 100% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, it seems sensible that students would place a strong emphasis on attending the most economically feasible option for college and that they would consider the role of educational debt when determining what kind of occupation they were interested in. However, this explanation alone seems insufficient in light of the fact that not a single Rockwood student intended to enroll at a tribal college, despite the fact that they were coming from the same community and expressed a similar amount of trepidation about paying for college. While the differences in students' academic preparation at these two schools likely played a role in explaining this divergence, potentially more important were the differences in support that the schools offered in helping students navigate the financial barriers to the college-going process.

While Rockwood students uniformly felt supported in navigating the financial barriers to college, Bridgman students' opinions about their financial preparation for college were mixed, though compared to their academic preparation, there was much more satisfaction with the support they had received. In fact, as the following excerpts illustrate, a number of students reported being very satisfied with the support they received in navigating the financial barriers to college.

> Interviewer: Do you think the school does a good job of talking to you about scholarships and how to pay for college?
>
> Keith (Bridgman): Oh ya, ya. They give us lists and lists of places we should call for scholarships, and they, they help us fill out FAFSA, and they help us, they even, you know, give us ACT prep, and they, you know, pay for our ACT's.

> Interviewer: So what kind of things do you think hold people back in life?
>
> John (Bridgman): All the teachers remind you of all the scholarships that you should fill out that'll help you get through it. And ya, there's like a lot of help around here, like teachers telling us, it's just that us kids have to get on it and do it.

As the examples from Keith and John illustrate, a number of students at Bridgman felt very supported in the financial aid process. Keith reported receiving support in filling out his FAFSA, and both students discussed the support they received in searching for scholarships. For both of these students, support in finding scholarships meant that they were given lists of places to call or that they were reminded by teachers about the importance of scholarships. While this support looked quite different than what students received at Rockwood, from John's perspective, this level of support was sufficient. Having been given the information he needed to find scholarships, he believed it was then up to him to make use of that support. In John's words, "it's just that us kids have to get on it and do it." This perspective closely parallels the previously discussed theme that the academic success at Bridgman was dependent on individual

responsibility and initiative. From John's perspective, the information to navigate the college-going process was available to students; it was just up to them to utilize that information.

While Keith and John felt supported in navigating the financial barriers to college, just as common were students who did not feel as though the school had done a sufficient job in supporting them in the college-going process. In the following three excerpts, Theresa, Mallory, and Tasha talk about their frustrations with the support they received in navigating the financial barriers to college.

> Interviewer: Do you think the school does a good job about talking to students about college and scholarships, or not so much?
>
> Theresa (Bridgman): No, I don't think so. I think they only like, like umm, they, the only way like college is brought up is like on career day, like when all the colleges come and all that, cause other than that, there's like really no one to talk to.

> Interviewer: Do they tell you about scholarships or how to apply for scholarships?
>
> Mallory (Bridgman): Ya, but like our little like, what do you call them, like our school counselor things, like they're kinda not good.
>
> Interviewer: Ya?
>
> Mallory (Bridgman): Ya, like they don't really help us too much.
>
> Interviewer: Ok, and is that the same with like college applications?
>
> Mallory (Bridgman): Ya, like I think you have to kinda do it on your own.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like Bridgman does a good job of talking to you about college and scholarships and things like that?
>
> Tasha (Bridgman): No.
>
> Interviewer: No?
>
> Tasha (Bridgman): Definitely not.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you say that?
>
> Tasha (Bridgman): Because, if it wasn't for me going to Upward Bound, I wouldn't even know the first thing about applying to a scholarship, or applying to a college.

In some ways, these students' perspectives on the support they had received in navigating the college-going process reaffirmed John's statement that it was up to the individual to, "get on it and do it." As Mallory noted, "I think you have to kinda do it on your own." However, while John felt that he had been given the skills he needed to, "get on it and do it," Tasha, Mallory, and Theresa wholeheartedly disagreed. These students spoke of the lack of support and information they had received from the school. While Tasha and Mallory felt that the information was lacking altogether, Theresa viewed it as being limited to days where colleges came to the school to recruit students. Whether present on certain days or not at all, the end result, at least from the perspective of these students, was that students had to make sense of the college-going process largely on their own.

Also of note in Mallory's statement was her concern about the lack of support she received from school guidance counselors. In her words, "our school counselor[s]…they're kinda not good." This was a concern that was not specific to Mallory, but was in fact echoed by a number of Bridgman students. As the following examples make apparent, there was a general sense of frustration and dissatisfaction among students about the support they had received from their guidance counselor.

> Interviewer: Ok, do you feel like the school has done a good job of like teaching you about how to apply to college or for scholarships and stuff, or not so much?
>
> Janet (Bridgman): Not so much.
>
> Interviewer: Not so much, why do you say that?
>
> Janet (Bridgman): Because we have a bad guidance counselor.

> Erica (Bridgman): And like career day, I think that's like a really good thing, but like, I'm not like pointing this person out, but like our counselor like don't really talk about anything, she's just like, oh hey, there's this that's, there's a school that's coming here to visit, you want to do it? That's all, like that's how it is.

While Erica indicated that she did not want to single out the guidance counselor, her statement, as well as those of Janet, Mallory, and other students, made it clear that there was a sense of frustration among many students about the lack of support they had received from their guidance counselor in navigating the financial barriers to college. The guidance counselors were not seen as a resource that could help students navigate the college-going process. Instead, they were viewed as uninvolved and unhelpful. At a school in which most students were grappling with the burden of how to pay for college, the absence of guidance counselors working to support students' in the college-going process left many students feeling unprepared and unsupported in their efforts to navigate the financial barriers to college.

While the efforts on the part of the guidance counselors may have been lacking, this does not mean that the school and individual teachers were not trying to create opportunities for students to learn about scholarships. In the following example, Tasha explains the origins of a class designed around helping students earn scholarships.

> Tasha (Bridgman): During the first semester, I was applying for the Gates' Millennium Scholarship, and you know, I was kind of slacking on my English class, because I would spend most of my time in there writing my essays, and then whenever I found out I had like a C in that class… the principal asked me why I had a bad grade, and I told him, and just like, you know, because, the years before, the senior English teacher was a woman named Nicolle Sparagon, and she had different classes, and in one class she would put the people with a GPA high enough to apply for the scholarship, because she knew how much, like how big of a deal it is, and, in that class, she would make assignments. The essays that you use for this scholarship are assignments. And she would help you with it, and you know, she helped my brother, he got it. And like, she just like kind of made it a big deal, she helped you, but I mean, I had to do the whole thing by myself, and I didn't know who to ask because, you know, she was the one who did it, she quit, nobody else here knew how to do it…And, ya, so I got, kind of got mad at him about it, and this semester he made a class, he made a class and it's a "Masters' Class" and it's for seniors, specifically for seniors applying for college and scholarships and like doing the ACT and stuff, and that's what they help you with in there. So, we got something, it was kind of too late to get it, but…

Tasha's description of how her struggles in applying for the Gates' Millennium Scholarship were exacerbated by the lack of structured scholarship support within the school speak to two important, though somewhat contradictory, themes about students' experiences at Bridgman: 1) The individual efforts on the part of teachers to support college-going, and 2) the

efforts on the part of the school administration to create structured support in the college-going process. Regarding the former point, when Ms. Sparagon quit, the class that was designed to help students earn the Gates' Millennium Scholarship ended, not because of its lack of value, but because, "Nobody else here knew how to do it." The fact that no one could step up to replace Ms. Sparagon's class would seem to indicate that the support that students had received from Ms. Sparagon was largely dependent on the initiative that she took to create opportunities for students to learn about scholarships, as opposed to a concerted effort on the part of the school to develop these programs. While these efforts did benefit students, they did so in ways that could not be counted on to persist as actors within the school changed.

While the disappearance of courses designed to help students in the college-going process calls into question the extent to which the school was structured to support students in their college-going efforts, Tasha's statement does indicate that the administration was working to change that. In light of Tasha's complaints about the support she had received in preparing for the Gates' Millennium Scholarship, the administration worked to develop the "Master's Class," a class designed around helping students apply for college and scholarships. While Tasha seemed lukewarm about the value of the course, noting that, "it was kind of too late," the administration's response would seem to indicate a genuine desire to support students and help them in the college-going process, even if the structures were not yet where they needed to be. While these structured opportunities to support students in the college-going process may eventually remove the need for idiosyncratic efforts on the part of the teachers, the fact that the administration's efforts were still in the nascent phases appeared to allow for the existence, and perhaps necessity, of the presence of both within the school.

When taking a holistic look at the financial support of students at Bridgman, it seems that while students were receiving occasional support from their teachers, and the school was making efforts to create courses aimed at helping students navigate some of the financial barriers to college, the support that students were receiving was not at a level that was adequate for most students. As a result, many Bridgman students indicated that finances were central to how they constructed their post-secondary aspirations.

Affirming Students' Lakota Identity

While the school struggled in its efforts to prepare students for college, they were much more successful in ensuring that students were grounded in their Lakota identity and committed to the betterment of themselves, their family, and their community. The most apparent way that students' Lakota identity was emphasized within the school was through the offering of Lakota-specific courses that all students were required to take. These courses included, "Lakota Art," "Lakota Culture," "Tribal Government," "Native American History," and "Lakota Language."

In addition to the course offerings at Bridgman, the school offered a number of performative and symbolic ways in which students could engage with their Lakota identity. Each day, the school held Morning Prayer in the gym, students sang the Lakota "Flag Song," and numerous posters were hung in the classrooms and hallways that emphasized the Lakota values of generosity, courage, respect, and wisdom. Similarly, the value of students' Lakota identity was made apparent in the extracurricular activities that were offered in the school. Students could partake in activities such as "Powwow Club," "Handgames Club," or "Dance Club." Additionally, when school sports teams achieved major milestones, students lined the hallway to recognize the students' accomplishments while an honoring song played over the intercom.

Through these efforts, the majority of students at Bridgman felt that the school strongly valued their Lakota identity.

In the following examples, Tasha and Linda share their perspectives on how they felt the school showed that they valued students' Lakota culture.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like your culture is valued in the school?
>
> Tasha (Bridgman): Ya
>
> Interviewer: How does it show?
>
> Tasha (Bridgman): When a team goes to, or like makes an accomplishment, usually what we do is…everybody will come out of the classroom and line up on the right side of the hallway all around the school, and the team or the person who has accomplished something will go all the way around, and they'll play an honoring song over the intercom, and they'll shake everyone's hand. So ya, I think that's pretty cool. And we have, we have a powwow that, we have an annual powwow here and like, it just happened last weekend, umm, we have like handgames club, dance club, ya…

> Interviewer: Do you feel like your culture is valued in the school?
>
> Linda (Bridgman): Hmm, ya. It is. I've actually seen, It amazes me how much culture is so like brought up in here. Because, like, just we have prayer just for MAPS testing, you know like, a sacred song comes up, or umm, any, anything, at our graduation, I went to a graduation, and our graduation's like all about us. Like, "Feather Tying Ceremony," you know, powwow music is playing, and umm, beading is really big around here. Everybody knows how to bead in this whole school. Umm, what else, the language, ya, we learn the language…we have powwow club, handgame, we play handgames, stuff like that.

Tasha and Linda described multiple ways in which they saw their Lakota identity being embraced within the school. For these students, their descriptions tended to focus on the extracurricular opportunities available to students, such as "Powwow Club" and "Handgames Club," as well as the ways that aspects of their Lakota culture were brought into significant moments within the school, such as the "Feather Tying Ceremony" at graduation and the ritualized way of recognizing the accomplishments of sports teams.

While students at Bridgman were fairly consistent in their belief that the school valued their Lakota identity, the majority of students' descriptions paralleled Tasha and Linda's emphasis on the extra-curricular opportunities available within the school. Much less common

among students was a discussion of the way that their Lakota identity was embraced in the classroom. One potential reason for this absence of conversation was the variability in the ways that teachers of different races sought to engage with students' Lakota identity.

The staff at Bridgman was composed of a mixture of traditionally certified Native American teachers and white teachers, though among the three schools I visited, Bridgman had the highest proportion of Native American teachers. While some students felt that all teachers valued their Lakota identity and worked to maintain and affirm it in the classroom, a number of students noted stark differences in the ways that teachers of different races sought to engage with students' Lakota identity. As the following examples illustrate, a number of students felt that the Lakota teachers made a much stronger effort to maintain and affirm students' Lakota identity and to incorporate it into the classroom.

> Interviewer: Is there a difference between the white teachers and the Native teachers in terms of how they show culture matters?
>
> Thomas (Bridgman): Yes. I mean like the white teachers just want to watch, but, well Lakota teachers like try to teach us Lakota as much as they could.

> Interviewer: What about to your teachers, what do you think your culture means to them?
>
> Erica (Bridgman): Well, for my Native teachers, I think it's really big here, because like, we lost our Lakota teacher, and like when we lost him, it was like a really big thing here, cause he was like such a big help and like, so now like we have prayers in the morning in the gym and stuff, and like smudge each other. I think it's really cool, because like, not many schools do that around here, and just, and like, there's like only a small amount of like our white teachers that like really do it. [7]

> Interviewer: Do you feel like your culture is valued in the school?
>
> Theresa (Bridgman): Umm, ya, but I think it could be valued more.
>
> Interviewer: Ok, can you say a little bit about both sides of that. How is it valued? And then in what ways you'd like to see it valued more?

[7] Smudging is a purification ritual among many Native American tribes that precedes spiritual ceremonies. For the Lakota, smudging involves the burning of cedar, sage, or sweetgrass.

> Theresa (Bridgman): I think it's like valued how like, they like, respect it and umm, like they try to use Lakota words, like if you go to the bathroom, you could see like Lakota words, like boys bathroom and then girls. Like, but it could be pushed a little more, and like, I think like, there's some teachers, like the Indian teachers, like to use the bathroom, they'll have you say it in Lakota, but not the white teachers. I think they should all do it like that.

As Thomas, Erica, and Theresa made clear, there was a difference in the ways the Lakota teachers and white teachers sought to engage with students' Lakota language and identity in the classroom. Thomas and Theresa talked about the ways that Lakota teachers tried to teach students the language, and Erica discussed the ways that Lakota teachers engaged in traditional Lakota practices within the classroom. These actions left students feeling as though their Lakota teachers truly valued their Lakota identity and culture.

In contrast, these students talked about the ways that their white teachers tended to act as observers who were reluctant to engage with Lakota practices. One way that Teresa illustrated this difference was in terms of which teachers required students to speak Lakota to use the bathroom. As Teresa stated, "like the Indian teachers, like to use the bathroom, they'll have you say it in Lakota, but not the white teachers." As a result of these differences in the ways that teachers at Bridgman engaged with the Lakota culture, students tended to believe that the white teachers were generally less willing to engage with their language and Lakota identity. In the words of Thomas, "the white teachers just want to watch."

While the descriptions of Thomas, Erica, and Theresa indicate a lack of willingness on the part of the white teachers to engage with students' Lakota identity, an even more problematic description of the white teachers was offered by Linda, who indicated that many of the white teachers did not understand the Lakota culture, and at times, responded to students in ways that were inconsistent with traditional Lakota practices.

> Linda (Bridgman): Like some teachers, ya, they respect our ways and stuff, but I've seen teachers that get mad at me for not looking them in the eye when they start scolding me or something. And our way is that

> you don't, you don't look somebody in the eye, disrespectfully at all. You don't do that, and you know, they don't, I guess it's just their first time being here, but they don't understand. But umm, they should take into consideration that if that's how we are brought up, than you need to realize it.

From Linda's perspective, the lack of cultural understanding on the part of some white teachers created cultural discontinuities within the classroom. While it was unclear from Linda's statement whether she felt that this cultural discontinuity impacted her academic success, it was clear that it bothered her and created a classroom environment in which she did not always feel comfortable.

In an effort to fully understand the role of the race of the teacher, it is worth noting that despite Linda's frustration with some of her white teachers, she also believed that some of the white teachers "respect our ways." One exemplar white teacher that a number of students mentioned as trying to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity was Mr. Ring. The following examples from John and Keith illustrate some of the ways in which Mr. Ring sought to engage with aspects of the Lakota culture.

> Interviewer: Is there a difference between your white teachers and your Native teachers in terms of what your culture means to them?
>
> John (Bridgman): To most teachers like, they don't really acknowledge it around here, like but ya, there's some of, like Ring, he's like a white guy, but he, he always tries to learn Lakota words, and tries to talk, or like ask us what certain words are or whatever. And then ya, like some of them acknowledge it, but others just go about their way.

> Interviewer: Does it seem like the teachers, maybe the white teachers specifically, that they respect and value your culture, even though they didn't grow up with it?
>
> Keith (Bridgman): Ya, they do. They, they, you could tell they do, because, I don't know, umm, like when somebody loses a family member, they, you know, they burn sage and like, you know, cause Ring, he does that a lot. He burns sage…And you know you can tell they really do respect it, cause they don't, like say anything about it, bad about it I guess.

John and Keith discussed the efforts on the part of Mr. Ring to not only learn about the Lakota culture, but to engage with it in the classroom. Mr. Ring tried to learn Lakota words, ask students what certain words meant, and smudge in the classroom. As a result of these actions,

students viewed Mr. Ring very positively. He was viewed as a person who cared about and respected students' Lakota identity, and he was also singled out by many students as being an exemplary teacher.

I highlight the efforts of Mr. Ring not to minimize the disconnect that existed between many of the white teachers and Lakota students at Bridgman, but rather to illustrate the fact that cultural disconnects were not as simple as whether there was a difference in skin color between teachers and students. For those white teachers who chose to engage with students' Lakota identity, students spoke very highly of them and appreciated their efforts. For those white teachers who sought to be passive observers of students' Lakota culture, there tended to be a sense that those teachers did not value their Lakota identity in the same way that their Lakota teachers did. At a school where one of the goals was to ensure that all students were grounded in their Lakota identity, the differences in the efforts put forth by these two groups of white teachers likely impacted how the schools' goals played out inside the classroom.

While the school's mission statement did not explicitly make a connection between the school's emphasis on maintaining and affirming students' Lakota identity and the academic aims of the school, I wondered whether this effort was acting as a protective factor in support of students' academic success. When students were asked whether they thought these efforts supported their academic success, their responses varied widely, with some students claiming it made no difference, others believing that it created a better learning environment, and still others believing that it increased their motivation to learn. The following examples capture these three perspectives. In order to contextualize these responses, it should be noted that each of these students described themselves as feeling strongly connected to their Lakota identity.

Interviewer: So you said earlier that you think your culture is really valued in the school.

Joanne (Bridgman): mmhmm.

Interviewer: Do you think this has helped your education?

Joanne (Bridgman): Ya, I think it is. Like, cause if I was like having a bad day, and I was just like, oh, I just want to give up on school and stuff like that, if I was stressing over my grades or something, like, and I'll go to like a ceremony or sweat, and I'll just feel better and just pick myself back up.

Interviewer: So, when you see your culture valued in the school, does that help your education, or does it not make a difference?

Linda (Bridgman): It doesn't really make a difference. It just makes you a better person.

Interviewer: Do you think that it helps your education when your culture is a big part of it?

Melvin (Bridgman): Yes, because like we get to learn like how, what our ancestors were like and how they lived and everything like that.

Interviewer: Does it make you more interested when it's about your own people?

Melvin (Bridgman): Ya

Interviewer: Do you think that helps you get better grades and stuff when you're more motivated, or it doesn't make a difference in terms of your grade?

Melvin (Bridgman): No, I mean, it's just, it's still going to be work, it's just like whether it's more interesting like you said, or you know, more fun.

To Joanne, the school's efforts to maintain and affirm her Lakota identity helped comfort her when she was having a bad day. The ability to participate in ceremonies or sweat helped her deal with the stresses of school and left her feeling rejuvenated and ready to learn. In contrast, Linda believed that the presence of her Lakota culture was not helping her overcome barriers or inspiring her to do better academically. She said quite plainly that the inclusion of her Lakota culture "doesn't really make a difference." From her perspective, she was going to find success regardless of whether it was included in the classroom or not. The inclusion of her culture simply helped make her a better person. Finally, to Melvin, the presence of his Lakota culture allowed the work to be more engaging and fun, though he did not believe that this made a difference in

his grades. In his words, “it’s still going to be work.” For students such as Melvin, despite their increased interest, success still came down to whether they were willing to put in the work.

Based on these students’ responses, it did not appear as though the school’s efforts to maintain and affirm students’ Lakota identity was having a direct impact on students’ learning. While some students did feel that they were more engaged when their Lakota identity was a central part of the classroom, in the end, it was still a matter of whether the student was willing to put in the work.

One potential reason for this lack of clear relationship between the academic and cultural mission of the school was that students rarely spoke of their Lakota identity being used to enhance their academic engagement or to help them relate to the material. Instead, students’ Lakota culture appeared to often be treated as an object of study in Lakota-specific classes and as something that they could engage with in ritualized ways during the non-academic portions of the school day. As a consequence, students saw little connection between the school’s efforts to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity and their overall academic success.

Conclusion

While many Bridgman students reported being satisfied with their educational experiences, there were a number of concerns raised by students, particularly as it related to the academic expectations of the school and its support for students’ post-secondary preparation. Many students at Bridgman did not feel as though they were pushed to do their best and consequently doubted whether they had received the knowledge that they would need to be successful in college. These students also expressed dissatisfaction with the support they received in navigating the financial barriers to college, calling into question the support they had

received from the counselors and the efforts on the part of the school to support them in the college-going process.

Owing in part to these shortcomings, many students planned to attend a tribal college. In fact, the primary reasons that students gave for wanting to attend a tribal college (i.e., to lessen the financial barrier of college and to help them get accustomed to the academic demands of college) were perfectly aligned with the critiques they offered of their education at Bridgman. Given this fact, it seems that not only did a lack of academic preparation create apprehension among students, but the lack of institutionalized support in navigating the financial aid process created barriers that served to shape students' post-secondary decision-making.

Although the school was still working to achieve their academic aims, they appeared to be doing well in achieving their mission of ensuring that students were grounded in their Lakota identity. Collectively, Bridgman students reported feeling more strongly connected to their Lakota identity than did students at either of the other two schools, a connection that was fostered through the strong relationships that existed between students and their Lakota teachers, the offering of Lakota-specific courses, and the offering of extra-curricular activities that maintained and affirmed students' Lakota identity.

However, despite the success of the school in ensuring that their students were firmly grounded in their Lakota identity, Bridgman students did not indicate that this effort impacted their academic success. In fact, while some students felt that the efforts to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity made them more interested in the content, they were nearly unanimous in believing that it did not have a direct effect on their academic success. Whether this perspective was due to the inconsistencies in the ways that culturally responsive teaching practices were

taken up in the classroom or was a consequence of students feeling confident in their ability to be academically successful regardless of the content, Bridgman students saw little academic value in the school's efforts to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity.

CHAPTER VIII

Aspen School

The third school in this study, Aspen, was founded as a Bureau of Indian Affairs school in the mid-1930's. However, unlike Bridgman, Aspen was founded after the publication of the *Meriam Report*. Consequently, students' experiences at Aspen were markedly different than at Bridgman. Rather than seeking to eradicate students' Native American culture, Aspen sought to embrace the history and culture of its students.

Reports by the superintendent in the late 1930's indicate that the school was focused on five major goals for the Lakota: 1) Economic Independence, 2) Self-Government, 3) Better Housing Facilities, 4) Better Health and Well-Being, and 5) Preservation and Improvement of Native Culture (Lakota, 2015). Consistent with the ideals of the *Meriam Report* (Meriam, 1928), these goals represent a more culturally respectful approach to education, particularly the school's emphasis on the preservation and improvement of Native culture. However, the desire to "improve" Native culture, as well as reports of the school's efforts to help the Lakota embrace economic practices that would allow them to integrate into white society, indicate that the education of students at Aspen had not yet fully moved away from the assimilationist ideals that had characterized the boarding school era. Nevertheless, this approach to education was a clear improvement over Pratt's, "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Pratt, 1892).

Over the course of the 20th century, the school continued to evolve away from the assimilationist policies of the past. Of particular importance was the school's decision to utilize

the "Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act" to become a tribal grant school. By becoming a tribal grant school, the school retained funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but decision-making was turned over to the tribe and the local school board. This change ostensibly allowed Aspen to make educational decisions that were more appropriate for the community and students being served. However, while this decision to become a tribal grant school has allowed the school to tailor the educational experiences of its students in ways that may not have otherwise been possible, as will become apparent in this chapter, students' educational experiences looked similar in many ways to the experiences of students at Bridgman.

Academic Experiences

Aspen School was located in a geographically isolated town of less than 1,000 people on the Davenport Indian Reservation. During the 2013-2104 school year, Aspen enrolled 350 high school students from the town and surrounding communities, approximately 95% of whom were eligible for free or reduced lunch. While students at Aspen were eligible to attend Rockwood if they met Rockwood's entrance requirements, given its location, Aspen was the only realistic schooling option for most of the students in the school.

The overarching mission at Aspen was to provide an environment in which students could achieve both Lakota and academic excellence. This mission was enumerated to include developing future leaders of the tribal community, integrating students' Lakota culture into all aspects of their education, forming collaborative partnerships with parents and the community, increasing the graduation rate, and helping students find success in their post-secondary decisions.

Reports on the standardized test scores of Aspen students indicate that the school had significant work to do in order to meet its goal of academic excellence. During the 2013-2014 school year, Aspen had a 3-percentage point increase in the number of students scoring advanced or proficient in math (14% vs. 17%), and a 5-percentage point increase in students scoring advanced or proficient in reading (11% vs. 16%) (Lakota, 2015). While these scores indicate that students' performance was improving, the overall low academic performance within the school suggests that there was significant progress to be made.

These academic shortcomings were not lost on students. As the following examples from Maggie and Alan indicate, when asked to describe their school, many students emphasized the lack of academic expectations within the school.

> Interviewer: So how would you describe Aspen as a school?
>
> Maggie (Aspen): Umm, Aspen is umm, it's a very welcoming place. It has a lot of things that lead back to our culture, but I think that we can be like a little more organized with things…and I think we could be more ahead in the things that we do, like there can be more homework, there can be like harder books to read, umm, we're really behind in our education, but that doesn't mean that we're not trying. I see teachers that do try, but there's some who don't really try as hard.

` Interviewer: How would you describe Aspen as a school?

> Alan (Aspen): Aspen as a school, I think it's getting better. I mean before, they used to let everybody just slack off and all that.
>
> Interviewer: So you feel like the expectations are getting a little bit higher?
>
> Alan (Aspen): Ya
>
> Interviewer: Are they where they should be?
>
> Alan (Aspen): No, they're not where they should be, but they, they're getting there.

To both Maggie and Alan, their overall perceptions of the school seemed to be a mix of frustration and optimism. While Maggie appreciated the welcoming environment of the school and the school's emphasis on her Lakota culture, she lamented the lack of homework, the absence of challenging books to read, and the presence of teachers who were not putting forth

the effort that she felt was necessary to be a good teacher. Similarly, Alan felt that the expectations were "not where they should be," though he did note that the school was making efforts to improve. For both of these students, a defining component of their schooling experience was the lack of academic expectations within the school.

While the academics of the school were not always the first thing that students spoke about, nearly all of the students echoed the concerns offered by Maggie and Alan when asked specifically about the academics of the school. In the following two excerpts, Howard and Nicole share with me their perspectives on the academic expectations within the school.

> Interviewer: Is it the academics that you feel aren't where they're supposed to do?
>
> Howard (Aspen): Ya because the work's not even that really hard. It should be harder. Instead of being like, there's a senior and his reading level's like 7th grade. How does that happen?

> Interviewer: Ok. So, you said there's not really advanced classes, why do you think that is?
>
> Nicole (Aspen): Hmm, I just think, like, we can't reach our goals that we're already required to do. So that we, like our levels aren't high enough to even get to the advanced.
>
> Interviewer: Ok, so you think that because the rest of the students aren't doing well, it prevents them from being able to offer you the more advanced classes?
>
> Nicole (Aspen): Ya, so it's like we still have to learn all the other stuff, so we can't do advanced stuff.

Both Howard and Nicole shared a sentiment that the academic expectations in the school were not where they needed to be, and both seemed to indicate that until their peers were more academically prepared, it would be an almost impossible task for the school to offer more advanced classes. As Nicole stated, "we can't reach our goals that we're already required to do.…our levels aren't high enough to even get to the advanced." While Howard's statement of "How does that happen?" makes him come across as somewhat incredulous about the situation, Nicole's words and tone seemed much more frustrated about the situation and much more

concerned about the long-term implications of not being able to take more advanced course offerings.

While Aspen students were consistent in their overall feelings about the lack of academic expectations within the school, there did appear to be a fair amount of variation in students' experiences at the classroom-level, differences that students often interpreted along racial lines. The teaching staff at Aspen was composed of a mixture of Native American teachers and Teach for America teachers, the latter group being predominantly white. The Teach for America teachers, a term that students used interchangeably with white, were singled out by students for their high-expectations and effort. This emphasis on high-expectations was consistent with the broader goals of the Teach for America program. These teachers were viewed as expecting the best out of students and pushing them to reach their potential. In contrast, students reported that the Native American teachers often held lower expectations for them and did not push them as hard in their classes. These teachers would reportedly allow students to "hang out" in the classroom, and many students expressed a belief that these teachers did not believe in them. The following three examples are representative of the ways students spoke about these two groups of teachers.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like there's a difference here between the Native teachers and the white teachers, in terms of either your relationships, or their expectations?
>
> Nicole (Aspen): Ya, like, the TFA teachers they have, they expect more out of us, and they push us to go farther. And they challenge us to do things, but like the Native teachers, it's like, they've been here so long and it's like, they don't, it's like they don't have faith in us or something.

> Maggie (Aspen): What I see is the teachers who've been here and are from around here, they're laid back. They don't, they don't push you. Their classes are simple. You could go in and get their paperwork, their worksheet done – 10 minutes. And then they'll, they'll just let you hang out. The TFA teachers are not like that. They have packets for you to do. If you're done you have to read until the bell rings, you have homework every night, and as for the teachers who aren't TFA, they hardly assign homework, and I think the kids favor the teachers who are from around here because of that reason. And they think differently of the TFA teachers because they want to push you and they want you to go to school and the TFA teachers,

> they, they come together, they have meetings of how, and they discuss how they can make their class better, and they just really care, and I don't think kids see the bright side of that.
>
> Interviewer: Do you feel like there's a difference between the white teachers and the Native teachers in terms of expectations or the connections you make with them?
>
> Breanna (Aspen): I think the TFA teachers go, like they go all out, which is a good thing. But then again, it's a bad thing. Like they expect too much from, they expect too much from us. And then the Native teachers, they just kinda let us go at our own pace.
>
> Interviewer: Which do you think is better? Expecting too much or letting you go at your own pace?
>
> Breanna (Aspen): I think expecting too much, that way you can always reach higher goals.

As these examples from Nicole, Maggie, and Breanna make clear, there was a strong sense among students that the Teach for America teachers, a term that both Breanna and Nicole used interchangeably with white, "expect more out of us, and push us to go farther." Most students expressed a belief that the Teach for America teachers believed in students more, held higher expectations for them, and were more committed to seeing them find success. In contrast, students viewed the Native American teachers as more likely to let them work at their own pace, hold low expectations for them, and allow them to just hang out in the classroom. From the perspective of these students, the fact that the Native American teachers did not push them and allowed them to hang out in the classroom led them to conclude that Native American teachers, "don't have faith in us or something."

While this was the first school where students were consistent in their belief that teachers of different races held differing academic expectations for them, it should be noted that this distinction was likely a remnant of the mission of the Teach for America program. The Teach for America teachers were being perceived in ways were consistent with the broader Teach for America mantra of high academic expectations for all students. What students perceived as racialized differences in teachers' expectations does not necessarily mean that the Native American teachers at Aspen were any different than any of the teachers at Rockwood or

Bridgman. It is certainly possible that the very focused effort of Teach for America teachers on high academic expectations would have created similar distinctions at Rockwood and Bridgman, regardless of the race of the teacher. Unfortunately, without observational data, I cannot make any claims as to whether the Teach for America teachers were significantly different than the teachers at the other schools. However, it is clear that this was the one school where the race of the teacher became quite salient in terms of how students thought about which teachers believed in their academic potential.

Given students' perceptions about the overall lack of academic expectations within the school and the inconsistency with which they were held to high expectations, Aspen students expressed concern over whether their academic experiences had prepared them for post-secondary success. As the following examples illustrate, many students expressed concern that they were not being provided with the academic knowledge they would need to be successful in college.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like the school's done a good job preparing you for college?
>
> Alan (Aspen): Hmm-mm
>
> Interviewer: No? Why?
>
> Alan (Aspen): They don't do a good job at all.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you say that?
>
> Alan (Aspen): Because they don't really prepare you. You don't really take that much AP Calc, and your math ain't that hard. I mean just like they give you a class, like your basics, like you just have to get done here. They don't give you more.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like Aspen's done a good job of preparing you for college?
>
> Traci (Aspen): No
>
> Interviewer: No? Why?
>
> Traci (Aspen): Because in most of my classes, I'm at an 8th grade level. And we're not even doing work that we should be doing as high schoolers.

Interviewer: Do you feel like the school has done a good job of preparing you for college?

Nicole (Aspen): Umm, no.

Interviewer: No? Why?

Nicole (Aspen): Because like, umm, they don't have like the classes that prepare you. So like when you go, you don't know what's going on. And like a lot of seniors that are off to college already, that I talk to, like they already said "I don't know what's going on," and "the school didn't prepare us."

Interviewer: Does that worry you?

Nicole (Aspen): Ya, I'm nervous.

To these three students, the lack of academic expectations within the school left them doubting their academic preparation for college. To Alan and Traci, the shortcomings of their academic preparation came as a result of the limited course offerings within the school and what they perceived as the low expectations that existed within their classrooms. As Traci noted, "we're not even doing work that we should be doing as high schoolers." This lack of academic rigor left Traci feeling unprepared for college. Similarly, Alan described the school as focusing on the bare minimums that students needed to graduate. From his perspective, the lack of academic push within the school left students lacking the knowledge that they would need to succeed in college. While these perspectives mirror the previously discussed statements of Nicole and Howard about the lack of advanced course offerings within the school, these statements extend these perspectives by making apparent the relationship that students saw between the low expectations within the school and their preparation for college.

The third example, from Nicole, reaffirms Traci and Alan's statement that the school was not providing students with the academic preparation that they would need in order to be successful in college. As Nicole stated, many of her friends who were currently at college told her that they, "don't know what's going on," and "the school didn't prepare us." As a consequence of these conversations, Nicole questioned the academic preparation offered by the school and expressed concern about her own academic preparation for college.

While most of these students' perceptions about their academic preparedness were based on speculation about what knowledge they would need in order to be successful in college, there was one student who I spoke with, Maggie, who was able to offer a first-hand account of the way the academic expectations at Aspen had prepared her for college. Maggie was unique in that she had already attended her college orientation and registered for classes, a fact that allowed her to speak more concretely about the ways that the academic expectations within the school had impacted her preparation for college. While the following example in some ways only reaffirms the concerns expressed by other students, her example is unique in that it moves beyond speculation and offers a more concrete description of the ways that the academic expectations within the school played out in the lives of Aspen students.

> Interviewer: You mentioned the kind of low expectations that some teachers have. Do you feel that because of those expectations, you're not as prepared for college as you should be?
>
> Maggie (Aspen): Ya, I mean, I feel like I'm actually really scared because I don't know what to expect, because of how, how my education has been. Like there's some kids, ok, this weekend I got my classes at State University, and umm, they put me in lower classes because of my ACT scores, but then there was a bunch of other kids from like the city schools and stuff that had really high ACT scores, and like, out of the whole senior class, I was like one of the top 3 to score high on the ACT's, and like, it just really brought me down because I thought I did good, and like I was ready, and then I seen them having like 28 and 29 on their ACT, and there I was with an 18, and I was just like, I don't know if I'm ready for this. Like it really did scare me, and like how umm, they put me in umm basic classes, and like I can test out of them if I want to, but that's where I was placed, and then there was these other kids who were already taking like college algebra, and I was taking pre-algebra, and it really did scare me, and like I really wish that, I just don't want other kids to go through that, because other kids, they don't have that strength to say, ok, well I'm just going to try it, and, I'm, I'm just going to see how I do. If they, if they go into the room and they see that, they're going to really doubt their self and they're not going to want to do it.

To Maggie, concerns over her academic preparation increased significantly after registering for classes and meeting the peers that she would be attending school with. Maggie was surprised at how well other students had done on their standardized tests and was taken aback by how academically unprepared this experience made her feel. Despite the fact that she had received the third highest ACT score in her class, she was being required to enroll in

remedial level courses at college, a fact that she would later inform me was likely to add an additional year on to her college experience.

While Maggie expressed a willingness to try her best to overcome this obstacle, she was worried that other students may not have the same, "strength to say, ok, well I'm just going to try it." Maggie indicated genuine concern over whether her peers would persevere if they found themselves in a similar situation. While it is unclear from my data whether students' aspirations had already been shaped by their concerns over their academic preparation, Maggie's statement certainly seems to indicate that these aspirations may be abandoned once the shortcomings of students' academic preparation become more tangible.

Financial Preparation

While the academic barriers that Aspen students perceived as existing for them were formidable, so too were the financial barriers. At a school where 95% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, finances were a major source of concern among students. As the following examples illustrate, students viewed finances as a major barrier to the college-going process, and for some, this barrier had already begun to shape their future aspirations.

> Interviewer: Ok, do you feel pretty prepared for college?
>
> Connie (Aspen): No
>
> Interviewer: How come?
>
> Connie (Aspen): I thought I was, but now that it's just right around the corner, I feel like I'm not prepared.
>
> Interviewer: What things worry you?
>
> Connie (Aspen): The budget…just financial stuff.

> Interviewer: Where do you plan to go to college?
>
> Breanna (Aspen): I got into Out-State Tribal, so that's probably where I'm going.

Interviewer: Ok, I see the In-State University shirt on, so I wasn't sure if you were considering them.

Breanna (Aspen): I got accepted there too, but I can't afford it.

Interviewer: Ok, so cost is a barrier that kept you from In-State University?

Breanna (Aspen): Ya.

Interviewer: Are there other barriers that you feel like could keep you from meeting the goals you have?

Breanna (Aspen): Probably my family, cause right now we don't, we don't have a house or anything. So I think that might play a big role. I might just end up going to Closer In-State University cause it's closer.

Interviewer: What do you see yourself doing 20 years from now?

Melissa (Aspen): I don't know. I had a different umm, I wanted to be a marine biologist, but I couldn't do that. Now I want to be a physical therapist.

Interviewer: So why did your goal change?

Melissa (Aspen): Umm, because I couldn't go to the school that I wanted to go to. I got in, I just can't find a way to pay for it, so I can't go.

To Connie, Breanna, and Melissa, the question of paying for college was a major source of concern. As the school year approached its conclusion, Connie expressed concern over whether she was as prepared for the financial side of college as she thought she was going to be. Similarly, Breanna was grappling with what school to attend as a result of her concerns over how to pay for college and her desire to be near her family who was dealing with financial troubles of their own. As a result of these concerns, Breanna was faced with the difficult decision of attending a tribal college that was over 500 miles away or attending an in-state university that would cost more, but would allow her to be near her family as they dealt with their financial struggles. The third student, Melissa, was forced to alter her goals, both academically and professionally, due to the financial barriers that she faced in enrolling at the school of her choice. While she wanted to become a marine biologist, she could not afford the school she had planned to attend. Consequently, she made the decision to attend a more affordable in-state university, despite the fact that it did not offer the field of study that she was most interested in. As a result,

Melissa was forced to re-evaluate not only her educational aspirations, but her occupational aspirations as well. While the financial barriers to college played out differently in the lives of these three students, it was clear that the cost of attending college was seen as a formidable barrier to the college-going process and one that had the potential to reshape students' aspirations.

Given the challenges that students faced in financing their college education, it would be hoped that students were receiving ample support from the school in navigating the financial barriers to college. Unfortunately, based on these students' reports, this did not appear to be the case. While some students did feel supported in navigating the financial barriers to college, the support that students received appeared to be quite inconsistent.

One of the major reasons that students felt unprepared to navigate the financial barriers to college came as a result of the lack of students who participated in the formal opportunities that the school offered to learn about scholarships. The following two examples represent the only instances of students mentioning formal opportunities to learn about scholarships.

> Interviewer: Does the school talk to you about scholarships and stuff like that?
>
> Nicole (Aspen): Ya, well, the class my 7th hour, it's ACT prep. There's only 3 of us in there, but we work on ACT's and we work on scholarships.
>
> Interviewer: Ya? Why is there only 3?
>
> Nicole (Aspen): Because like, I guess we're the only ones who wanted to be in there.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like the school does a good job of telling you like where you can get money and what you need to do to be able to be financially?
>
> Sandra (Aspen): Umm, not really, towards the end of our last semester, a teacher finally decided to take a step and do a class that would help seniors prepare for college and find scholarships and ways to get money to pay for college.

As noted above, these were the only mentions among these participants of a formal class aimed at preparing students for scholarships, and given Nicole's description that only three students were enrolled in the ACT prep course, it would seem that these courses were elective for students. If students wanted to learn about scholarships or prepare for the ACT, these courses would allow them that opportunity. However, unlike the "Gates' Class," which all of the high-achieving seniors at Rockwood were enrolled, the formal financial preparation opportunities at Aspen were dependent on students taking the initiative to enroll. Unfortunately, this was an initiative that most Aspen students did not appear to take, a fact that may hint at the absence of a college-going culture among students within the school.

Despite the dearth of students enrolled in the scholarship courses, this does not mean that Aspen students were navigating the financial barriers to college solely on their own. In fact, a number of students talked about the efforts of their teachers in helping them navigate the college-going process. The following excerpts from Andrea, Charles, and Maggie describe what this support looked like.

> Interviewer: So what about scholarships and stuff? Has the school done a good job of helping you?
>
> Andrea (Aspen): Umm, again, I wouldn't say the school, but I would say the teachers would. Like some teachers, not all of them. Some of them would like help you with scholarships, or if you need references, they'll help you. Or if they want you to look at some of these different types of scholarships, they'll tell you.

> Interviewer: Has the school done a good job of talking about scholarships and how to pay for college?
>
> Charles (Aspen): Huh uh.
>
> Interviewer: No?
>
> Charles (Aspen): Probably just a couple teachers, but not the whole school.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like the school's done a good job of talking to kids about college and scholarships?

Maggie (Aspen): No.

Interviewer: No?

Maggie (Aspen): Like, no, not at all. Because all this year, like every scholarship that I have applied for, I had to find on my own. And like even though I would, I would get help from my teachers, and there was a couple teachers that would be like, hey Maggie, I found this scholarship. But again, those were my TFA teachers. It wasn't coming from my school counselor, or like my principal. No one. So, and then, it just, it really bothered me, because it seems like because they're a guidance counselor, than maybe they should be guiding us to find, to find these scholarships. So, no I don't think they informed us enough because, why do you think half of the senior class, more than half of the senior class, applied for no scholarships at all? Because it wasn't handed to them.

For Andrea, Charles, and Maggie, much of their knowledge about the financial aid process came from teachers who chose to take up the topic individually with them. For these students, their teachers worked with them on a one-on-one basis where they were informed of scholarships that they might be good candidates for.

While the support that Andrea received helped her feel more confident in her ability to navigate the financial barriers to college, both Charles and Maggie indicated that this level of support was insufficient. For Maggie, despite the support she had received from some of her teachers, she was very bothered by the lack of support that she and her peers had received from the school guidance counselor in navigating the financial barriers to college. As she noted, "it really bothered me, because it seems like because they're a guidance counselor, than maybe they should be guiding us to…find these scholarships."

From Maggie's perspective, the lack of consistent support in navigating the financial barriers to college was one of the main reasons that a majority of her classmates had failed to apply for scholarships. As she stated, "Why do you think half of the senior class, more than half of the senior class, applied for no scholarships at all? Because it wasn't handed to them." While this statement seemingly reaffirms the notion that there was an absence of a college-going culture among Aspen students, as these students did not take the initiative to apply for scholarships if it was not handed to them, Maggie clearly believed that this responsibility was not

on the students alone. From Maggie's perspective, many of the struggles that students faced were due to the lack of structured support offered by the school, particularly on the part of the guidance counselors.

Maggie's frustrations with the guidance counselors were echoed by a number of other Aspen students. In the following three examples, Howard, Dana, and Breanna shed light on the interactions that occurred between the guidance counselors and the high-achieving students within the school.

> Interviewer: Who do you get your guidance from?
>
> Howard (Aspen): From up in the Buffalo Room up there.
>
> Interviewer: That's where the guidance counselor is?
>
> Howard (Aspen): Ya, but if you don't ask, then you won't know when the ACT is or nothing.
>
> Interviewer: Do you think that should be something that the school does a better job of telling people about?
>
> Howard (Aspen): Ya, they should inform, then they should tell the kids that there is scholarships, endless scholarships, that you could just fill out for, but they don't. You gotta figure it out yourself.

> Interviewer: Do you think the school has done a good job of talking to you about scholarships and how to pay for college?
>
> Dana (Aspen): No
>
> Interviewer: No? Who do you talk to about that stuff? Or who do you think you would talk to?
>
> Dana (Aspen): Well I just go to like two teachers…but like I never really went to the counselors because they're always busy with something.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like the school's done a good job of preparing you for college?
>
> Breanna (Aspen): Hmm, not really.
>
> Interviewer: Not really, why?
>
> Breanna (Aspen): They don't, ok, for example, last year I was a junior. I was doing this scholarship, and it's a two-year type scholarship. Like you get accepted to camp and then you do the scholarship your senior year, and the only way to get the scholarship your senior year, is to do it, is to get accepted to the camp your junior year, and they didn't. Like the counselors last year, not this year but last year, they didn't help me at all. Like I told them I needed this and I needed that, and I just, I just needed help, and they wouldn't,

> they said, oh, scholarships are for seniors, you don't need to do it. And so they kind of just pushed me away from it, I think that would have really helped.

These three examples offer three distinct ways that students viewed the guidance counselors within the school. However, in even the most positive description of their support, the counselors were not seen as being as much of a resource as they potentially could.

From Howard's perspective, the process of receiving support in navigating the barriers to college was left largely on the shoulders of the students. Howard was a student who sought out help from the guidance counselors, and consequently felt he had attained the information he needed to be successful. However, as he made clear, if a student did not ask the guidance counselors for support, they were unlikely to receive the information they would need to navigate the college-going process. In his words, "they should tell kids there is endless scholarships…but they don't. You gotta figure it out yourself."

In the case of Dana, she felt that while there were a couple of teachers she could go to for support, the guidance counselors were too busy to help students find scholarships. While she may have viewed the guidance counselors as capable of helping her, their other obligations rendered them inaccessible, thereby removing them as a potential source of support.

Finally, Breanna offered a perspective on the counselors that indicated that in some ways the guidance counselors' efforts worked against students' efforts to navigate the college-going process. Breanna described her counselors as being unsupportive of her efforts to apply for a two-part scholarship, the first part of which had to be completed during her junior year. Her counselors told her that, "scholarships are for seniors, you don't need to do it." As a result, Breanna felt pushed away from her efforts to attain a scholarship that may have helped support in her efforts to pay for college. In this way, the counselors actually served to create an additional

barrier to the college-going process by discouraging her from applying to scholarships during her junior year.

When taken as a whole, it seems that at Aspen, the support that students received in navigating the college-going process was inconsistent at best. Very few students took the classes that were designed to help students earn scholarships, the support that students received from their teachers was reportedly dependent on whether they were singled out individually, the support from counselors was reportedly dependent on whether students sought it out, and when counselors did offer support, it was potentially so misguided that it actually hurt students' abilities to earn scholarships. As a result of the variability that students reported in the support they received in navigating the financial barriers to college, students' perceptions of their financial preparedness varied widely, a fact that likely played a role in the wide array of students' post-secondary aspirations at Aspen.

Affirming Students' Lakota Identity

While the school appeared to be struggling to meet its stated goal of helping students become prepared for post-secondary success, they appeared to be finding more success in their goal of promoting Lakota excellence and incorporating students' Lakota identity into the school. Students at Aspen were given formal opportunities to learn about aspects of their Lakota identity in courses such as "Lakota Language," "Lakota Studies," and "Tribal Government." In addition to these course offerings, students' Lakota identity was affirmed in a number of symbolic and performative ways throughout the school. The morning prayer was said over the intercom each day, the core Lakota values were posted throughout the school, many of the Lakota teachers

smudged in the classroom, students could attend *Inipi* on the grounds of the school, and students were required to attend "Circle Up[8]" each week.

As a consequence of these efforts, students were firm in their belief that their Lakota identity was strongly valued within the school. The following excerpts from Stanley and Sandra capture this perspective.

> Interviewer: Alright. Do you feel like your culture is valued in the school?
>
> Stanley (Aspen): Yes it is a lot.
>
> Interviewer: Ya? In what ways?
>
> Stanley (Aspen): Umm, there's a, all the Lakota values they have, and everybody kind of just lives by those and...I know they have, they have the sweat here, and they go in all the time. They go down there into the sweat and pray during school.

> Interviewer: Do you feel like your Lakota culture is valued in the school?
>
> Sandra (Aspen): Ya it is. Our school tries to take part in our culture as much as they can, like we have sweat every week, and how the beginning of the week, we, the whole school circles up, and everyone smudges, sing a prayer song.

As Sandra and Stanley make clear, students believed that the school worked hard to embrace their Lakota identity. As Sandra states, "our school tries to take part in our culture as much as they can." Whether it be through offering students the opportunity to pray, smudge, or attend sweat, students felt that the school strongly valued their Lakota identity.

Given what students perceived as a strong effort on the part of the school to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity, Aspen students were in agreement that this emphasis on their Lakota identity helped create a more comfortable learning environment. In the following three excerpts,

[8] Maggie (Aspen): The morning "Circle Up," it's just like umm, it's just like the news, they start with the news and then they like have a prayer and then they smudge everyone off and then everyone shakes hands, cause in the Lakota way, shaking hands is very respectful. And umm, ya, they smudge us off, they pray, and they tell us to all have a good day, and they have the drum group who sings the "Flag Song."

Richard, Laura, and Maggie discuss the value that they saw in the school's efforts to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity.

> Interviewer: Ok, what about the presence of your culture. Does that have an impact on your actual learning or not so much?
>
> Richard (Aspen): Umm, I don't know about the language, but I mean the spiritual side, I mean I like the sage and everything, it calms me down. And just being able to feel like I'm at home while I'm at school, it's just pretty nice.
>
> Interviewer: Does it help to have your culture valued in the school?
>
> Laura (Aspen): Ya it helps.
>
> Interviewer: Ya? Why?
>
> Laura (Aspen): Because it's like, I don't know, I guess it's like a home-y feeling to come to school and to know that we can be ourselves here.
>
> Interviewer: So do you feel that this connection with your culture has helped your education?
>
> Maggie (Aspen): Ya, because there was days where I was having a really bad day, and didn't want to come to school, but, after the morning "Circle Up," then I felt better. Or like, even when, cause we only have it on Mondays, and if I was having a bad day on a Wednesday, and we'd go to class, and we'd just say I'm having a bad day, and they would smudge you off, and it would be good. Like, it feels better.

As Richard, Laura, and Maggie make clear, efforts to embrace students' Lakota identity were important in helping students maintain a positive mindset for learning. Both Richard and Laura described the inclusion of their Lakota identity as helping to create an environment that was comfortable and that felt like home. In Laura's words, "it's like a home-y feeling to come to school and to know that we can be ourselves here." For these students, the ability to engage with their Lakota identity within the school lessened the barrier that may have existed if they were trying to navigate a home and school environment that were culturally incongruent. Instead, students were able to feel at home in the school, a fact that made students feel much more comfortable in their learning environment. As Richard stated, "being able to feel like I'm at home while I'm at school, it's just pretty nice."

In addition to feeling more at home within the school, Richard and Maggie singled out the inclusion of the spiritual side of their Lakota identity as being useful in helping them have a better mindset to learn. As Richard noted, "the spiritual side…it calms me down." Maggie similarly talked about the way that smudging in the classroom helped turn around her attitude when she was having a bad day. For these students, the school's efforts to embrace their Lakota identity created a learning environment that helped support their academic success and put them in a better mindset for learning.

While students were nearly unanimous in their belief that their Lakota identity was valued within the school, this does not mean that it was embraced consistently on a classroom-by-classroom basis. When I asked students whether there were differences in the ways their culture was valued by teachers of different races, I received an array of responses. Some students, such as Dana and Maggie, felt that both the Lakota and white teachers demonstrated an equal appreciation of students' Lakota identity.

> Interviewer: What about to your teachers? What do you think being Lakota means to them?
>
> Dana (Aspen): Like the Lakota teachers, I think that they're really proud and they want to pass it down, like our language and everything, and I think they like it, or I mean love being Lakota.
>
> Interviewer: What about the non-Lakota teachers? What does the culture mean to them?
>
> Dana (Aspen): I think it means a lot to them because a lot of these like TFA teachers, they're really interested in our culture and they, you know, they want to learn language, and they just like it so much. Like how we love it, I think they love it too.

> Maggie (Aspen): Even like our teachers who come from around the world, they respect it [the Lakota culture]. Like, the way we smudge off in morning, in the morning "Circle Up." They smudge off, they shake hands, I mean, they're really respectful of it, and like when we give them, sometimes when the teachers leave, we give them star quilts, and that's like a really high honor in our way of life and they accept it, so I think that's really cool that they accept the way our culture is. So I really like that.

As is evident in both Dana and Maggie's statement, many students viewed both the Teach for America and Native American teachers as showing a genuine interest in students'

Lakota identity. As Dana noted, "Like how we love it, I think they love it too." However, of note in the descriptions offered by both Dana and Maggie are the ways in which these students described their Teach for America teachers as showing an interest in the Lakota culture. These students' descriptions were focused exclusively on the performative aspects of the Lakota culture, such as learning the language and smudging. There was no discussion about these teachers trying to engage with students' Lakota identity as part of their classroom pedagogy.

This focus by the Teach for America teachers on the performative aspects of the Lakota culture may explain why some students perceived differences in how the Lakota teachers embraced students' Lakota identity within the classroom. In the following excerpts, Howard and Traci describe these differences, focusing specifically on the ways that Lakota teachers try to teach students about their Lakota culture.

> Interviewer: So the ones [teachers] who are like close to you, is that a good thing or bad thing?
>
> Howard (Aspen): Umm, don't mean no different to me. It's just, I don't know, it's just like they got a job here. Or they teach the same, but it's just like when they're Lakota, they try to teach you Lakota stuff kinda I guess.

> Interviewer: What do you think your culture means to your teachers?
>
> Traci (Aspen): Just a history to study I guess.
>
> Interviewer: Ok, would you say that's the case for both your teachers who are Lakota and the Teach for America teachers?
>
> Traci (Aspen): Umm no. The teachers that are Lakota, they try to teach us about it more and more every day. But like to teachers from Teach for America, it doesn't really matter.

As Howard stated, the Lakota teachers "try to teach you Lakota stuff." From Howard's perspective, these efforts on the part of his Lakota teachers were in contrast to the efforts made by the Teach for America teachers, who he indicated were less interested in embracing students' Lakota identity in the classroom. In fact, based on his description of these teachers as having just, "got a job here," there seemed to be skepticism as to whether the Teach for America

teachers cared at all about the Lakota culture. Similarly, Traci noted that the Lakota teachers, "try to teach us about it [the Lakota culture] more and more every day." In contrast to the Lakota teachers, Traci felt that to the Teach for America teachers, the Lakota culture "doesn't really matter" and that it was just "a history to study." From the perspective of these students, not only did the Lakota teachers make a greater effort to embrace students' Lakota identity in the classroom, but there was genuine skepticism as to whether the Teach for America teachers cared about the Lakota culture at all. It seems that much like the academic expectations within the school, some students felt that teachers' efforts to embrace their Lakota identity was closely related to the race of the teacher.

Given the myriad ways that students' Lakota identity was embraced within the classroom, students were quite mixed in terms of how they made sense of the academic implications of these efforts. The following excerpts from Sandra, Alan, and Nicole capture this array of perspectives.

> Interviewer: Do you ever have those classes where you don't see your culture at all?
>
> Sandra (Aspen): Ya
>
> Interviewer: Does it matter to you? Do you still do well? Are you kind of not interested?
>
> Sandra (Aspen): Umm, it doesn't really matter to me. I'm open to learning new things.

> Interviewer: Ok, do you find that you like your Lakota classes better? Lakota Language, Native American Studies, Tribal Government, do you like those classes better than the other ones?
>
> Alan (Aspen): Ya I do, because it like tells me about my culture, I can learn more about myself.
>
> Interviewer: Is it easier to be motivated in those?
>
> Alan (Aspen): Ya
>
> Interviewer: So what about classes like social studies. Sometimes it's kind of like from a white person's perspective. Do you feel like those classes are hard to be interested in or motivated in?
>
> Alan (Aspen): Uhh, kinda, but then again, I just look at it as a class I have to get done with in order to move on.

> Interviewer: What about your classes like Lakota Language or Tribal Government? Are those more interesting to you because you can connect to your culture better that way? Or not, doesn't really make a difference?
>
> Nicole (Aspen): I feel like I could connect more to it.
>
> Interviewer: Ok. What about classes like social studies that are sometimes written from a white perspective. Does that affect you in any way?
>
> Nicole (Aspen): Umm, like, ya it's kind of like not interesting when it's from someone else's perspective, but when it's like coming from someone that's actually been through it and know what they're talking about, than it's more interesting. And like, it's, it's hard to feel like maybe these people aren't talking about really what happened.

For these three students, all of whom self-identified as feeling strongly connected to their Lakota identity, the inclusion of aspects of their Lakota identity into the classroom had very different implications on their academic engagement. For Sandra, she indicated that efforts to incorporate her Lakota identity into the classroom did not have a meaningful impact on her academic engagement. In her words, "it doesn't really matter to me. I'm open to learning new things." Sandra did not appear to view the absence of her Lakota culture as anything that might create a barrier to her learning. Instead, she was comfortable engaging with whatever content she was expected to learn.

Similar to the perspective offered by Sandra, Alan did not believe that there was a direct relationship between his academic success and the inclusion of his Lakota identity. However, unlike Sandra, he did indicate that he was more interested in classes in which his Lakota identity was present. As he noted, "I can learn more about myself." Despite the increased interest that accompanied Alan's opportunity to learn more about himself, this was not enough for him to believe that his academic success would be affected by its presence. From Alan's perspective, when classes did not incorporate his Lakota identity, he simply viewed it "as a class I have to get done with in order to move on." It seems that through Alan's ability to maintain a focus on achieving his goals, he was able to maintain a perspective that allowed him to put forth the effort

needed to be successful in all of his classes, regardless of the extent to which they attempted to embrace his Lakota identity.

A final perspective on the academic implications of the inclusion of students' Lakota identity was offered by Nicole. Nicole felt that she was better able to connect to the content in classes where her Lakota identity was embraced. Conversely, in classes that did not seek to engage with her Lakota identity, she expressed reservations about the validity of what she was learning, stating, "it's hard to feel like maybe these people aren't talking about really what happened." As a result of not trusting the information that she was expected to learn, she expressed being disinterested in the content and wanting to hear about it from someone who was more closely connected to the information being presented. While it is unclear whether Nicole's perspective extended beyond her engagement with social studies, her statement makes clear that efforts to embrace her Lakota identity in the classroom had the potential to increase her academic engagement in meaningful ways.

When taken as a whole, it seems that just as was the case at Rockwood and Bridgman, the inclusion of students' Lakota identity did not work to increase students' academic engagement in ways that were consistent among students. While some students felt that the inclusion of their Lakota identity helped them be more engaged with the curriculum, others expressed a sense of confidence that they would be able to be academically successful regardless. Without having observed the ways that these culturally relevant teaching practices were enacted, and being able to then connect these observations with students' perceptions of the value of culturally relevant teaching practices, I am unable to clarify the linkage between these teaching practices and students' academic engagement.

While the school's efforts to incorporate students' Lakota identity into the classroom was not having a clear impact on students' academic achievement, it was undoubtedly working to create a better learning environment and to support the school's goals of promoting Lakota excellence among its students. The majority of these students reported feeling strongly connected to their Lakota identity and many intended to return to the reservation to work after college, facts that suggest that Aspen was successfully meeting at least one portion of its educational mission.

Conclusion

Students at Aspen raised a number of concerns about the academic expectations within the school, the differing expectations of teachers, and the school's support for their post-secondary preparation.

While the school was demonstrating improvement in students' academic performance, most students at Aspen reported that the academic expectations within the school were not yet where they needed to be. Unfortunately, efforts to increase the academic expectations of the school appeared to be inconsistently embraced among the teaching staff. The Teach for America teachers were generally viewed as holding higher expectations for students and pushing students to do their best, sometimes beyond what students believed they were capable of. In contrast, students perceived the Native American teachers as holding lower expectations and failing to push them to do their best. As a consequence of these varying expectations, students at Aspen expressed a great deal of concern about their academic preparation for college.

Students at Aspen also expressed dissatisfaction with the support they had received in navigating the financial barriers to college. While there were formal opportunities to learn about college and scholarships, these opportunities were taken up by very few students within the

school. Consequently, students became much more reliant on the individual support they received from teachers and guidance counselors. Unfortunately, while some students felt this support was adequate, many students indicated that they had to navigate the college-going process largely on their own. As a result, a number of students reported feeling very concerned about paying for college, and for some students, such as Melissa, these factors reshaped their long-term aspirations and forced them to reevaluate their occupational goals.

While the school's push towards academic excellence left plenty of room for improvement, the school did a better job of maintaining and affirming students' Lakota identity. When students were asked about the school's efforts to embrace their Lakota identity, they were nearly unanimous in believing that their Lakota identity was valued and respected in the school, a fact that they believed helped create a more comfortable learning environment. However, students did note a considerable amount of variation on a classroom-by-classroom basis. While some students felt that all teachers respected and embraced their Lakota identity, many thought that the Lakota teachers did a better job of incorporating it into their curriculum and teaching it to the students.

When examining the extent to which these efforts impacted students' academic success, students varied in terms of how much they felt that this emphasis on their Lakota identity impacted their education. While most students felt that it made for a more welcoming learning environment and increased their motivation to learn, most students said that it had little impact on their academic performance. For many of these high-achieving students, they were confident that they were going to find academic success regardless of the cultural relevance of the curriculum.

While these efforts to incorporate students' Lakota identity into the curriculum may not have had a direct effect on students' academic performance, there is little doubt that these efforts worked to create a more comfortable learning environment and supported the school's goals of promoting Lakota excellence among all of its students.

CHAPTER IX

Analysis and Conclusions

In order to understand the academic successes and post-secondary aspirations of these high-achieving Lakota youth, I interviewed high-achieving junior and senior students about their experiences both inside and outside of school, paying particularly attention to the role of significant others (e.g., peers, siblings, parents, and teachers) within and across these environments. Through these interviews, I was able to gain a greater understanding of how these Lakota youth made sense of the variety of factors shaping their educational experiences, as well as understand how these experiences worked to shape their post-secondary aspirations.

In the first portion of this chapter, I will summarize and analyze the findings of my research. This discussion will be organized around the research questions that guided this study. Through this organization, I will be better able to contextualize my results in relation to the extant literature on the topic, allowing me the opportunity to look for points of alignment, as well as recognize important findings and questions that this study raised. Then, after discussing these findings, I will consider the limitations of this study, future directions for research, and offer some concluding thoughts on the educational experiences of these high-achieving Lakota youth.

Analysis

What are the cultural, social, and institutional factors that support the educational achievement and aspirations of high-achieving Lakota youth?

My efforts to understand the factors that supported students' achievement and aspirations spanned multiple areas of a student's life. At the individual-level, I was interested in the ways that students' cultural identity supported their success and shaped their future aspirations. Did students' connectedness to their Lakota identity help them find success in the presence of a curriculum that was often Eurocentric in nature? Did students' Lakota identity shape where they hoped to attend college? Was there a relationship between students' Lakota identity and how they thought about their future opportunities on the reservation? Through these questions and others, I was interested in understanding whether students' cultural identity acted as a protective factor in supporting their academic success and future aspirations.

In addition to examining students' Lakota identity, I was also interested in the ways that the social factors in these students' lives shaped their educational success and aspirations. In examining the social factors shaping students' success, I was interested in not only understanding the ways that students' immediate social environment impacted their experiences, such as how their interactions with family members and friends supported their success, but also in how they made sense of the broader social environment in which they lived, an environment that was shaped by factors such as culture, poverty, and racism[9]. By understanding the everyday interactions students had with significant others, as well as how students made sense of the broader social factors shaping life on the reservation, I hoped to gain a more complete understanding of how students thought about the myriad social factors that shaped their academic success and post-secondary aspirations.

[9] This multi-level conceptualization of the social factors in an individual's life is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1977, 1994). In Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model, the everyday social interactions that an individual has with significant others in their life make up the individual's "microsystem." The broader social factors that shape the environment of the individual are referred to as the "macrosystem."

Finally, given my emphasis on students' success in schools, I was interested in the ways that the school itself had shaped students' success and aspirations. While schools have little control over the social factors outside of school that shape students' students' lives, they have an immense amount of control over what students' educational experiences look like – as these are in part a function of the social and organizational dynamics of the school Given this fact, I wanted to know how these experiences worked to shape students' academic success and future aspirations.

In order to examine the different aspects of these students' lives in a more focused manner, my first research question, "What are the cultural, social, and institutional factors that support the educational achievement and aspirations of high-achieving Lakota youth?" was broken into the following three sub-questions: *1) In what ways are students' academic success and future aspirations shaped by how they make meaning of what it means to "be" Lakota and the salience of that identity in their lives?; 2) In what ways are students' academic success and future aspirations shaped by the micro- (e.g., interactions with teachers, peers, and parents) and macro-level social factors (e.g., culture, values, opportunity) within their environment?;* and *3) What is the role of the school in shaping and supporting students' academic success and post-secondary aspirations?*

In order to offer a more focused analysis of each aspect of this research question, as well to put my findings in conversation with the extant research literature, I will examine each of these sub-questions individually.

In what ways are students' academic success and future aspirations shaped by how they make meaning of what it means to "be" Lakota and the salience of that identity in their lives?

While there were a number of cultural factors that likely supported these students' success, I was particularly interested in the role of students' cultural identity. Students' cultural identity has been central to a number of studies that have examined the academic experiences of minority students (Cummins, 1986; Tharp, 1982; Philips, 1983), and it is an aspect of these students' lives that all three schools in this study were actively seeking to develop.

For Native American students who possess a strong cultural identity, researchers have suggested that these students may be able to find success in non-culturally relevant classrooms due to the way their cultural identity prevents them from feeling as though they are having to choose between the culture of the school and the culture of their home. By feeling as though they can find success in school, while still maintaining a strong connection to their cultural identity, these students may be better able to maintain pro-schooling dispositions that support their academic engagement and success (Lafromoboise et al., 2006; Ward, 2005; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & Lafromboise, 2001).

While the logic behind the value of a strong cultural identity is sound, there are other researchers who have found that students' cultural identity is of only moderate importance to understanding their success. Much more important to understanding these students' success are factors such as their support system and their self-esteem (Stumblingbear-Riddle & Romans, 2012; Whitesell, Mitchell, & Spicer, 2009). From these researchers' perspectives, students' cultural identity does not offer as robust of an explanation for their academic success as other aspects of their life.

Given these competing perspectives on the importance of students' cultural identity, I entered this study uncertain as to how students' Lakota identity would affect their success. If

students Lakota identity was central to understanding their success, I assumed that almost all of the students in this study would possess a strong Lakota identity. However, this was not the case among the students I interviewed. Instead, what I found was a high degree of variability in terms of how connected these students felt to their Lakota identity, with some students describing their Lakota identity as a way of life, and others stating that it meant nothing to them. There were no patterns by gender, grade, educational aspiration, occupational aspiration, or where they hoped to eventually live, that appeared to be related to how strongly an individual identified with their Lakota identity.

This lack of clear relationship between students' Lakota identity and their educational success is not to suggest that students' Lakota identity was unimportant, or to discount the sizeable body of literature utilizing the Cultural Discontinuity Framework (Cummins, 1986; Lipka & McCarty, 1994; Philips, 1983; Vogt et al., 1987). However, for these students, who were living in a community where aspects of their Lakota culture were always present, who were attending schools where almost all of their peers were Lakota, and who were attending schools that sought to maintain and affirm their Lakota identity, their Lakota identity did not appear to act as a particularly important protective factor in their success. For these students, it is possible that the ubiquitousness of the Lakota culture in their everyday life may have been enough to protect them from feeling as though their academic efforts would compromise their ability to maintain strong ties to their Lakota identity.

For a student living off the reservation, where their identity may only be embraced at home, the importance of a strong Lakota identity may be much more salient. Unfortunately, without having interviewed Lakota students who lived away from the reservation, I am unable to make any claims about the importance of students' Lakota identity outside of the reservation.

Future research that seeks to understand the experiences of Lakota students away from the reservation would complement this study well. By understanding the experiences of Lakota students away from the reservation, it would be possible to determine whether the students in this study offer a meaningful departure from the work of Cummins (1986) and others who have emphasized the importance of students' culture in understanding their success (Lafromoboise et al., 2006; Ward, 2005; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & Lafromboise, 2001), or if my findings simply reinforce the need to consider the context-specific nature of resilience in order to properly analyze the protective factors supporting students' success.

In what ways are students' academic success and future aspirations shaped by the micro- (e.g., interactions with teachers, peers, and parents) and macro-level social factors (e.g., culture, values, opportunity) within their environment?

The students in this study shared a number of commonalities in terms of the social factors that supported their success. These similarities existed both in terms of the individual-level interactions that students had with their teachers, peers, and family members, as well as in how students made sense of some of the broader social factors that had shaped their environment. In fact, if I had been given interview transcripts describing students' definitions of success, their home lives, and their beliefs in the value of education, I would not have been able to predict which school they attended. This inability to predict which school students attended is quite remarkable when one considers the relative ease with which their school could have been predicted once their post-secondary aspirations were known.

The similarity in these students' lives outside of school was certainly no coincidence. Having strong social support systems that emphasized the value of education undoubtedly

supported students' educational achievement. These students had parents who emphasized the importance of attending college, had siblings who encouraged them to do their best, and had peers who supported them in their efforts to succeed. In other words, these students were growing up in an environment that emphasized academic success and instilled in them a belief in the value of education. As a result, these students developed pro-schooling dispositions that worked to support their academic success.

In addition to having strong support systems, these high-achieving students consistently made sense of the historically documented risk factors that shaped their social environment in ways that supported their academic success. The risk factors that were considered in this analysis included racism, discrimination, students' perceptions of the reservation, historical trauma, and students' belief in the opportunity structure of America.

Given the somewhat intangible ways through which these factors impact students, their relationship to a child's learning can be difficult to measure. While these risk factors may create barriers to students' learning, they often only pose a risk if students recognize them as such. If students do not recognize the potential risks that these factors pose to their success, their educational efforts are unlikely to be altered. Consequently, examining how students thought about these potential risk factors was critical to understanding their academic experiences.

One potential way that factors such as racism, discrimination, and a lack of job opportunities may pose a risk to students' success is if students do not believe they will be given equal opportunities to succeed. Ogbu (1987) argues that involuntary minorities have not seen education pay off for members of their family and community in the same way it has for whites, and have consequently rejected the belief that education will offer them equal economic

opportunity. Consequently, involuntary minorities may see little reason to put forth the time and effort needed to do well in school, or to believe in traditionally held notions of how to make it in America. I anticipated that this concern would be particularly salient to students in this study, who were seeking to find success within an environment characterized by extreme poverty and high unemployment (Lakota, 2015).

Interestingly, despite these students' positioning as involuntary minorities, they were consistent in their belief in the value of education. These students spoke of the ways that education increased their chances for jobs, money, and opportunity, both on the reservation and off. This belief in the opportunity structure of America likely allowed them to remain engaged in the educational process and to maintain their drive for academic success. Said differently, if these students did not question the value of education, and their family members had instilled in them its importance, there would be no reason for these students to disengage from the educational process or to adopt dispositions that would be counter to their educational success. As a result, these students were likely better able to maintain dispositions towards education that supported their academic success.

It remains unclear as to why these students did not feel constrained in their future possibilities. This perspective was inconsistent with Ogbu's (1987) Cultural Ecological Theory and its suggestion that involuntary minorities question the value of succeeding in school. Given the limited job opportunities on the Davenport Indian Reservation, it seemed plausible that these Lakota students might question the value of their academic success. However, this was not a perspective that any of these high-achieving students expressed. They all believed that education would give them a better life, whether that meant providing them with the opportunity to move away from the reservation, or giving them better opportunities within their community. As a

result, the potential risks to students' success posed by a history of unfair hiring practices and a lack of economic opportunities were almost entirely negated by students' belief in the opportunities available to them through education.

A second potential way that broad social factors posed a risk to students' success came in the form of racism and discrimination. These students were seeking success in a state that the American Indian Movement had previously dubbed, "The most racist state in the U.S.A." (Reinhardt, 2007). While the American Indian Movement made this statement almost a half-century ago, these students' experiences would suggest that little has changed in South Dakota. Nearly all of the students in this study had experienced racism and discrimination firsthand. These experiences included being called racial epithets at sporting events, having non-Native American students make sounds intended to be mocking of their Lakota culture, and being followed around by security guards in stores.

Interestingly, despite these students' experiences with racism and discrimination, they almost all made sense of this potential risk factor in a way that was likely to support their future success. A number of students talked about using the racism and discrimination they faced as motivation to prove people wrong. A common sentiment among these students was the idea of wanting to prove to people that Native Americans can be successful. To these students, racism and discrimination were not factors that would hold them back; they were factors that pushed them to do better than people thought they were capable. Other students talked about ignoring racism, brushing it off, or hoping to avoid it through passing.

Regardless of which of these perspectives students took, there were no students who reported having lowered their aspirations in anticipation of not receiving an equal opportunity to

achieve their goals, or who believed that racism and discrimination were likely to prevent them from meeting their goals. Consequently, these students were able to maintain their push for academic excellence and to not feel constrained by the potential implications of racism and discrimination. These students had adopted perspectives on racism and discrimination that acted as protective factors in the face of any racism or discrimination that they experienced, a fact that helped support their academic success and future aspirations.

A third way that these students' success and aspirations was shaped by the world around them was through their perspectives of life on the reservation. For some students, the Davenport Indian Reservation was a place that they wanted to get away from. These students viewed education as their best hope for moving away from the reservation. By doing well in school, they could attend college and have the opportunity to search for jobs outside of the reservation. For other students, the reservation was home, and it was a place that they wanted to help improve. To these students, education was a means through which they could work to improve the community and the lives of others on the reservation.

While these two perspectives were opposed in some ways, they were linked by a common thread. At the core of each perspective was the belief that education would afford them the opportunity to create the future they envisioned, whether that was through providing them with the opportunity to get away from the reservation or by giving them the knowledge and skills they would need to make the reservation a better place.

As a consequence of the connection that students saw between their educational success and their ability to achieve their goals, students' perceptions of the reservation worked to support their success and future aspirations in similar ways, regardless of whether their perspective of the

reservation was positive or negative. The desire to create change was similar for both groups, and education was seen as a key factor in supporting that goal. So while these students may have held contrasting views of the reservation, both perspectives of the reservation served to support students' efforts towards academic success and were influential in shaping their post-secondary aspirations.

A final way that I had speculated that these students' success and aspirations might be shaped by social factors within their environment was through the historical trauma associated with the boarding school era. While Brave Heart has consistently demonstrated the impact of historical trauma among the Lakota (Brave Heart, 1998; 1999a,b; 2000; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998), only one student in the entire study, Jill, mentioned the experiences of students in the boarding school era or hinted at the idea of historical trauma. However, even in this case, it was not done in an overly negative way or in a way that would suggest that the painful history of the boarding school era was influencing how she made sense of her own educational experiences.

> Interviewer: How did you end up attending Rockwood?
>
> Jill (Rockwood): Umm, well like, one of my, one of the counselors here, she's like my bigger sister really, but she's one of my cousins, and she went to school here, and like my mom went to school here, my dad, my auntie, my uncle, everyone went to school here. And then like my grandma, when my grandma was in high school, she was at Bridgman just cause like here it wasn't always like good here. Like, ya, so umm, but even though she went to Bridgman, she wished she came to Rockwood just for the education, and then she sent all her kids here.

Jill was aware of the experiences of former students at Rockwood and the way that this had shaped her grandmother's education. As Jill noted, "it wasn't always like good here." However, these experiences had not been enough to prevent Jill's grandmother from wanting to send her own children to Rockwood, nor did these experiences appear to color Jill's perception of the school. Jill's grandmother believed that Rockwood provided a superior academic experience, and this was a perspective that Jill had adopted as well. Jill spoke of Rockwood's

history as a matter of fact and she did not speak of her family's experiences in a way that alluded to any experiences associated with historical trauma. While Jill recognized that the experiences of Rockwood students were not, "always like good," she offered no indication that the experiences of former Rockwood students were affecting her opportunities for success in any way.

In making sense of the limited dialogue that existed around the concept of historical trauma, it is important to note that on the Davenport Indian Reservation, historical trauma was not just a buzzword used by researchers, it was a word that was explicitly used by many individuals within the community to discuss the challenges that they faced. As noted in Chapter Two, one of the school board members actually proposed a resolution that they stop using the concept of historical trauma to explain the academic struggles of their students. The concept of historical trauma was so ubiquitous and frequently cited that this board member felt it was appropriate to do away with the term so that they could turn their attention to other aspects of students' learning. Given the prevalence of this concept on this reservation, I anticipated that it would be a word that many students would have been familiar with and a word that many students might use to explain the struggles that they or their peers had experienced. However, these students made no reference to the concept of historical trauma. This does not mean that historical trauma was not affecting these students in meaningful ways. In fact, historical trauma had undoubtedly shaped their community and many of the individuals with whom they interacted (Adams, 1995; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Giago, 1978). However, historical trauma was not something that these high-achieving students appeared to actively think about in terms of the factors that shaped their academic success or future aspirations.

When looking across the various social factors shaping these students' lives, it seems that many of them worked to support students' success in similar ways. For example, factors such as students' support systems and their belief in the value of education consistently acted to push students to do their best in school and to set high goals for themselves. Some of the other protective factors that supported students' success depended on how students made sense of the social factors that had shaped their environment. For example, while some students viewed the reservation very negatively, this increased their motivation to succeed and to create new opportunities for themselves. For other students, who viewed the reservation in a positive light, there was a strong desire to do well in school so they could create positive change within the community. While these two perspectives on the reservation are contradictory, in both cases, they served to support students' academic success and future aspirations.

What is the role of the school in shaping and supporting students' academic success and post-secondary aspirations?

The schools that students attended played a pivotal role in shaping their academic success and post-secondary aspirations. While there were numerous ways in which students believed that these schools influenced their academic experiences, two that were particularly noteworthy were the academic expectations within the school and the support that students received in the college-going process. While I will offer a school-level analysis of these factors in research question two, I will utilize this space to foreshadow that discussion and offer a brief overview of how these factors worked to support students' success and aspirations.

The students in this study were recruited based on their high-achieving academic status, a fact that I had presumed would indicate a high degree of similarity in their academic experiences.

However, after interviewing these students, it became clear that the school that students attended played a significant role in defining what their academic success looked like. When students perceived their teachers as holding high expectations for them, students strived to do their best and worked hard to meet the goals that their teachers had set for them. When this occurred, students felt confident in their academic preparation, and they fully believed that the work they were putting in towards school was going to help them find success in college. In contrast, when students did not believe they were being held to high expectations, they still worked to meet the expectations of their teachers, but they believed that their learning opportunities were being hindered, and they did not feel that they had been afforded the same academic preparation that students at other schools were given. As a consequence, many of the students in this study were skeptical about their readiness for college and felt unsure that they had been given the knowledge they would need to be successful. In this way, the academic expectations that students' perceived to exist within the classrooms of these schools had significant effects on how they defined their academic success, as well as on how they thought about their post-secondary possibilities.

A second way that students indicated that their school had played an important role in shaping their success and post-secondary aspirations was through the support they received in the college-going process. Students at all three schools spoke of the importance of receiving support in understanding the college application process and navigating the financial barriers to college. Unfortunately, the extent to which students felt supported in navigating this potential barrier varied by school, and at times, there were even variations within schools. When students reported having been given formal opportunities to learn about scholarships, their confidence in their ability to navigate the financial barriers to college increased immensely. These students felt

confident that they would be able to pay for college and expressed a belief that they had been given the necessary support to find post-secondary success.

At schools where students perceived the support as less structured, and where students reported having been given fewer formal opportunities to work on scholarship essays, students expressed much more uncertainty about their ability to pay for college and many had not applied for any scholarships. Owing in part to this fact, many of these students sought to attend tribal colleges and in-state universities, schools that would place less of a financial burden on them.

The strong relationship that emerged between students' perceptions of the support they received in the college-going process and where they aspired to attend college strongly suggests that these schools played a critical role in shaping students' post-secondary aspirations.

How do the factors that support students' achievement and aspirations vary across schooling contexts?

As discussed in sub-question three, students' academic success and aspirations were shaped in significant ways by the schools they attended. These students' achievement and aspirations were shaped by how they perceived the expectations of their teachers, the support they received in navigating the college-going process, the efforts of their peers, and the efforts of their school to affirm their Lakota identity.

At Rockwood, students felt that all of their the teachers maintained high expectations and pushed them to do their best. As Henry told me, "They push us beyond our limits!" For these students, the school was set up to support their academic success. Students felt that the teachers believed in them, they were held to high expectations, their peers were academically able to keep up with their teachers' high-expectations, and there was a culture within the school that

emphasized academic excellence. In short, based on these students' perceptions, it would appear that the school was structured to support the academic success of all of its students.

Further supporting students' success at Rockwood was the school's emphasis on the maintenance and affirmation of students' Lakota identity. Rockwood students believed that the school made an effort to incorporate their Lakota identity into all aspects of the school day, and students spoke about their teachers' efforts to incorporate conversations about the Lakota culture and life on the reservation into the classroom content. In these ways, the school was structured to minimize the cultural discontinuities that may have otherwise existed between the culture of the student and the culture of the school. While most Rockwood students did not feel that their school's efforts to embrace their Lakota identity had a direct impact on their academic success, many of these students did speak of being more comfortable in their learning environment and more motivated to learn.

Through the academic and cultural efforts of the school, Rockwood students believed that they were surrounded with supports that worked to promote their academic success. Consequently, these students did not feel the burden of having to overcome the risk factors of low expectations, cultural incongruence within the classroom, or a peer culture that devalued academic success. Instead, these students felt pushed to do their best, in a classroom in which they felt their Lakota identity was clearly valued. As a result, Rockwood students felt very supported in their efforts towards academic success.

While students at all three schools demonstrated academic resilience by achieving exceptional academic success relative to their peers, the educational experiences of students at Bridgman and Aspen looked markedly different than the experiences of students at Rockwood.

At Bridgman, students described their teachers as holding low academic expectations, and many teachers were viewed as putting in only a half-hearted effort towards their job. This lack of a school-wide emphasis on academics was further exacerbated by a peer culture that students described as being disruptive and unprepared to meet the academic expectations of their teachers. As a consequence of these facts, many students expressed concern about whether they were receiving the academic preparation that they would need to be successful in college.

While students at Bridgman felt that the academic efforts of the school potentially hindered their success, they did indicate that their educational experiences were supported by their Lakota teachers' efforts to embrace their Lakota identity in the classroom. These teachers were viewed as working to create a culturally congruent learning environment, a fact that likely served to protect many students against the risks described in the Cultural Discontinuity Framework (Cummins, 1986). Unfortunately, when this was occurring in an educational environment comprised of teachers who were said to have failed to enact the high-expectations portion of culturally relevant pedagogy (Lason-Billings, 1995), and an environment in which students' peers were not academically prepared for the demands of their courses, Bridgman students' academic success looked very different than the success of Rockwood students.

Students' experiences at Aspen were very similar to the experiences of students at Bridgman. Students reported concerns about their preparation for college, expressed a belief that a number of their teachers did not push them to do their best, and many felt that they were being held back by the academic abilities of their peers. As Traci told me, "In most of my classes, I'm at an 8th grade level. And we're not even doing work that we should be doing as high schoolers."

While the academic expectations at both Aspen and Bridgman were not where these high-achieving students felt they should be, one important difference between these schools was the presence of Teach for America teachers at Aspen. Students at Aspen consistently reported that their Teach for America teachers believed in their academic abilities, held high expectations for them, and worked hard to give students the best educational experience they could. In these ways, the efforts of some of the teachers at Aspen did work to support students' academic success. Unfortunately, outside of these classrooms, students felt that they were held to low expectations and were not being pushed in the way that they should be. As a result, students' academic resilience at Aspen looked very similar to students at Bridgman. While these students were finding academic success relative to their peers, it was often in the face of low expectations that did not prepare them for their post-secondary aspirations.

As was the case at both Rockwood and Bridgman, Aspen students felt that their school's efforts to embrace their Lakota identity created a more comfortable and welcoming learning environment. However, based on students' descriptions of the ways that the school sought to embrace their Lakota identity, these efforts appeared to seldom be used to enhance teachers' instruction. As a result, most Aspen students reported seeing little connection between the school's effort to embrace their Lakota identity and their academic success, though they did feel more comfortable, and at times, more motivated to learn.

Owing largely to the differences in students' experiences at their respective schools, students' post-secondary aspirations varied in significant ways. Students at Rockwood were more likely to aspire to attend a 4-year out-of-state university than any other type of college. These students spoke confidently about their academic preparation for college and felt confident that they had been provided with the academic skills they would need to achieve their goals.

Equally important in shaping Rockwood students' aspirations was the support that they received in navigating potential barriers to the college-going process. Rockwood students had the opportunity to learn about scholarships in their "Gates' Class," were paired with mentors who supported them in the college-going process, and had a guidance counselor who helped students apply for colleges, scholarships, and summer programs focused on college preparation. Through these efforts, students felt knowledgeable about the college-going process and had a clear idea of how to reach their goals.

Given students' reports of Rockwood's efforts to prepare students both academically and financially for college, it seems hardly a coincidence that these students aspired to attend colleges that were often more academically selective and costly than the colleges that students at other schools were considering.

At Bridgman, where students expressed a belief that sports were more valued than academics, students expressed concern about their academic preparation for college. These students recognized the low expectations within their classrooms and spoke of peers who were off to college and had informed them that they had not been academically prepared for what they experienced in college. Bridgman students also spoke of the lack of structured course offerings designed to teach them about colleges and scholarships, and many students reported being very unhappy with the support they had received from the school guidance counselor in navigating the college-going process. As a result of these experiences, students expressed a great deal of concern about their academic and financial preparedness for college.

Owing in part to students' concerns about their academic and financial preparedness for college, many Bridgman students aspired to attend a tribal college. As Merlin noted, "one of the

reasons we're going down there, cause it has free tuition for Native American students. So that's one of the good things. We can go down there and like try it out, cause it'll be economically helpful. Then if, maybe if we don't like it, we can try a different college. But just to like, freshman year, just so we'll like start getting scholarships and like try to get the hang of college." As Merlin's statement illustrates, tribal colleges offered students the opportunity to earn scholarships and to, "try to get the hang of college." To Merlin, tribal colleges were a place where he could focus on gaining the academic and financial preparation that he had not received in high school, while at the same time getting a taste of college life.

For students at Bridgman, who expressed a great deal of concern about their academic and financial preparedness for college, there was a high-degree of alignment between the affordances they saw of enrolling at a tribal college and the shortcomings that they saw of their education up to that point[10].

At Aspen, students perceived the academic expectations of the school as relatively low, though varying on a classroom-by-classroom basis. Aspen students reported very few formal opportunities to learn about colleges and scholarships, and these opportunities were taken up by very few students. Additionally, the scholarship support that students received from teachers and counselors appears to have been quite uneven. While some students felt that the teachers singled them out and let them know about scholarships, other students felt that they were left to make sense of the college-going process largely on their own. As a result, students at Aspen were

[10] While I have emphasized the importance of finances and academic preparation in students' decisions, these were certainly not the only reasons that Bridgman students desired to attend tribal colleges. Over half of students at Bridgman reported feeling strongly connected to their Lakota identity, a fact that likely played a strong role in their decision to attend a college that would offer a more culturally responsive and/or affirming educational experience. However, they did not mention these aspects of their decision-making in our conversations, and I am consequently unable to analyze the role of their Lakota identity in shaping their post-secondary aspirations.

mixed in their perceptions of their academic and financial preparedness for college, a fact that was likely influential in the development of post-secondary aspirations that occupied a space somewhere in between those of Rockwood students and Bridgman students, though being more closely aligned with Bridgman students.

When looking across students' experiences at these three schools, and considering the ways that students' aspirations were shaped by their experiences within their respective school, a number of points seem clear. The first is that resilience is a dynamic concept (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; O'Connor et al., 2014). While these schools often worked to support students in their efforts for academic success, they appeared to at times put students' academic success at risk. For example, students at both Aspen and Bridgman indicated that the school did not provide them with an academic experience that would prepare them for success in college, a fact that ultimately shaped their post-secondary aspirations and redefined what academic resilience looked like within their respective school. However, these students also singled out a number of teachers who cared about them and supported them in their college-going efforts, factors that positively shaped their post-secondary aspirations. In these ways, students' experiences within their respective school acted as both risk and protective factors, a fact that illustrates the dynamic nature of risk and resilience, and the need to consider it as such.

A second important point that this cross-school comparison illustrates is the value of a school-wide emphasis on academic achievement, an emphasis that has been coined "academic press" in the research literature (Lee & Smith, 1999). Through institutional structures aimed at supporting the academic press of a school, schools are better able to achieve their academic mission.

At Rockwood, there were clear examples of concerted efforts to support the school's academic mission. Students reported that all teachers held high expectations for them, students who were struggling were required to attend tutoring, and students had to demonstrate academic proficiency for the grade in which they were entering. In these ways, the organization of the school was designed to support students' academic success. As a result, students reported feeling that all of their teachers believed in their abilities and that their educational experience was providing them with the knowledge they would need to be successful in college.

Based on the accounts of students at Bridgman and Aspen, the academic press at these schools was decidedly weaker. Whether it was due to the fact that these schools had to enroll all students, not just those who demonstrated grade-level proficiency, or the lack of programs aimed at ensuring that students who were falling behind were given support in improving their academic performance, the students at both Bridgman and Aspen reported that their teachers held low expectations for them. These students felt that teachers doubted their abilities and failed to push them to do their best. As a result, students expressed skepticism about their academic preparation for college.

When comparing these three schools, it seems that the school-wide efforts at Rockwood to support students' academic success created coherence around the school's educational mission and students expressed a belief that all of their teachers believed in their academic abilities and pushed them to do their best. In this way, the institutionalized structure and norms of Rockwood worked to support the academic resilience of these students. In contrast, based on students' responses, there appeared to be a lack of institutional coherence around the educational mission of Bridgman and Aspen. This lack of a consistent push towards the school's academic mission

resulted in a weak academic press, a fact that played out in students' negative descriptions of their educational experiences and their concerns over their preparation for college.

A final, but important, point of note when looking across these three schools is the role of teachers and counselors in shaping students' post-secondary aspirations. By helping students overcome barriers to their success, teachers and counselors were able to act as "empowerment agents" in these students' lives. Stanton-Salazar (2011) defines this empowerment as, "the active participatory process of gaining resources [and] competencies needed to increase control over one's life and accomplish important life goals" (p. 1066).

At Rockwood, Tiffany, clearly stood out as an empowerment agent. She helped students navigate the college-going process and helped students enroll in summer programs aimed at college preparation. Through her efforts, students were given the preparation and support that they would need to sustain their success. At both Aspen and Bridgman, there were very limited discussions of the role of guidance counselors in helping students navigate the college-going process. In fact, a number of students spoke specifically about the lack of support they had received from their guidance counselor. Without the knowledge that guidance counselors could provide, these students were tasked with finding other ways to make sense of the college-going process, a system that many students were unfamiliar with.

One way in which students overcame this challenge was through the support of their teachers. There were teachers at all three schools who were singled out for helping students find scholarships. Some of these teachers did it on a one-on-one basis, while others used class time to talk about available scholarships. Although these teachers' opportunities for talking about scholarships were likely limited by their teaching obligations, these teachers acted as

empowerment agents as they sought to provide students with the resources they would need to make sense of the college-going process.

When looking across these schools, it seems that at all three schools there were individuals acting as empowerment agents who were working to provide students with the opportunity to determine their own direction in life. These individuals undoubtedly shaped students' preparation for college and acted as an important resource in these students' efforts towards post-secondary success. By ensuring that students have access to these individuals, schools can work to support students' success and future aspirations.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study. Consequently, caution is warranted when making sense of these results, particularly as it relates to the validity and generalizability of these claims. In terms of the generalizability of the study, there were two significant shortcomings. First, I only included three of the four high schools on this reservation. The fourth school, which chose not to participate, was located in a town that was smaller than those in this study, and was also more geographically isolated. Students at that high school may have made sense of their educational experiences in ways that were unique among this population, and may have also held very different ideas about their economic possibilities for the future. Without the inclusion of these students, I cannot generalize my findings to high-achieving students across the entire reservation.

A second drawback to the generalizability of these results comes from the fact that students volunteered to participate in the study. As a consequence, there may have been a response bias in terms of those who wanted to talk to an outside researcher. As previously

discussed, I only talked to a portion of the high-achieving students at each of these schools. While I do not believe that there was anything systematic about those who chose to participate or not participate, I am aware of at least one student who was initially interested, but then decided that she did not want to talk about Lakota culture with a white researcher. Although I am not aware of any other instances of this happening, it is possible that because of my positioning as a cultural outsider, some students did not want to participate. If there were in fact other instances, it may raise important questions about my findings regarding students' cultural identity. If those who felt the most strongly connected to their Lakota identity did not want to talk to me because of my positioning as a white researcher, it may have skewed my understanding of the factors that shaped students' success. Again, I have no knowledge of this happening outside of one instance, but it is something to consider in making sense of these results.

My positioning as a white researcher may also cause concern regarding the validity of these results. I was interpreting students' responses through my own cultural lens. It remains possible that I have misunderstood what these students were telling me. Although I have made considerable efforts to avoid this source of bias, including attempting to share my analysis with all of my research participants and discussing both my questionnaire and findings with members of each of the three schools, my positioning as a cultural outsider leaves the possibility of miscommunication and the imposition of a western perspective on students' experiences as an ever-enduring limitation.

A final limitation to this study comes from its emphasis on high-achieving students. My selection criteria eliminated those students who were struggling within their respective school. While this is not a limitation in terms of my ability to answer my research questions, it does preclude me from determining whether these characteristics were unique among high-achieving

students. For example, academically struggling students in these schools may have shared many of the same factors that supported the academic success of these high-achieving students (e.g., a supportive family, belief in the value of education, etc.). If this was found to be the case, I may have overstated the importance of certain support factors in these students' lives. Future study that examines the experiences of academically struggling Lakota students would help address this limitation.

Future Directions

Given the limitations of this work, there are a number of future directions for study that would greatly improve the existing research on the educational experiences of Lakota students. First, given my interest in the institutional factors that shape students' academic success, it would be informative to include students from a range of achievement levels. While the exclusion of struggling students from this study has been useful in focusing on the factors that support students' success, it also runs the risk of over-simplifying the experiences of students in these schools. This may be particularly relevant at Rockwood, where there appeared to be very few risks to students' success. It is quite likely that struggling students at Rockwood would share a very different perspective on their education and the factors that have shaped their educational experiences. By including these students, a more complete picture of students' experiences in these schools would likely emerge.

Future research would also benefit from collaboration with Lakota researchers. Having additional support from Lakota researchers in the study design, data collection, and data analysis, would greatly enhance the validity of this work. Not only would this minimize concerns over

culturally biased perspectives, it would also allow for greater opportunities for triangulation of the conclusions drawn from the study.

Related to the study design, future research on the achievement of Lakota students might benefit from the inclusion of classroom observations. In order to better understand how students make sense of culturally relevant teaching practices, it would be useful to have observational data through which the presence or absence of students' culture could be assessed, as well as to examine the interactions between teachers and students. By adding this information, the findings would likely be more robust and more easily put into the context of the extant literature.

Future research would also benefit from the inclusion of Lakota students who live outside of the reservation, particularly as it relates to understanding how students' Lakota identity may act as a protective factor in supporting their academic success. As previously discussed, the students in this study were constantly surrounded by their Lakota culture, a fact that may have lessened the importance of their Lakota identity as a protective factor in their academic success. By interviewing students outside of the reservation, where they may only see aspects of their Lakota identity at home, the importance of students' Lakota identity may become much more apparent.

A final way that future research on the educational experiences of Lakota students would benefit is through a narrower focus on students' post-secondary aspirations. Given my efforts to examine students' current success, as well as their future aspirations, I feel that certain aspects of their post-secondary decision-making were under examined. For example, it would be informative to know how students thought about the presence of support systems when making their college decisions, as well as what other factors they considered when deciding where to go

to college. To truly understand high-achieving Lakota students' post-secondary aspirations, further study is required.

Conclusion

I began this study to examine the academic resilience of high-achieving Lakota youth, a group whose resilience has gone largely unexamined in the research literature. The results of this study have added important insights into this area of research, but they have also raised important questions about the context-specific nature of resilience and role of the school in shaping students' future aspirations.

Outside of school, these students reported a number of similarities that supported their academic resilience. Students reported being pushed by their family to be educationally successful, they did not feel they would be held back by racism and discrimination, and they felt in control of their future outcomes. Consequently, many of the historically documented risk factors that may have compromised their academic success were rendered relatively unimportant. As a result, students believed in the value of education and maintained academic dispositions that supported their educational success.

Within schools, these students' experiences were much more varied, a fact that had significant implications on what their academic resilience looked like. While students at all three schools did their best to find success in light of the opportunities that were presented to them, these opportunities varied by school. As a result, students' academic resilience and post-secondary aspirations were shaped in very different ways and students were left with differing levels of confidence about their academic and financial preparedness for college.

Given the fact that these high-achieving students had such uniformity in their lives outside of school, yet emerged from their respective schools with such different ideas about their futures, the role of the school in shaping students' future aspirations seems undeniable. These students were doing their best to make the most of their educational opportunity, but through the mission, organization, academic press, and post-secondary support of the school, these schools became active participants in shaping students' futures. This is a role that schools cannot take lightly, and I hope that this study can help schools support the current and future successes of their Lakota students.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduce study: I'm interested in the educational experiences of Lakota students at your school. I'm going to ask you a series of questions about what it means to you to be Lakota, your experiences within the school, your hopes for the future, and how you think the school could be improved.

Understanding Identity

1) What does being Lakota mean to your parents and grandparents?

2) What does being Lakota mean to your friends?

3) What does being Lakota mean to your teachers?

4) What does being Lakota mean to you?

5) Do you feel strongly connected to your Lakota identity? In what ways is it a part of your life?

Understanding Personal Background

6) Who has been responsible for raising you?

7) What did these people say about the importance of education? How did this affect you?

8) Do you have any siblings? Older or younger?

9) Did they do well in school? Did this have any effect on you?

10) (If older) What are they doing now?

11) How many close friends do you have?

12) What do these friends think about the importance of education? (How do they do in school?)

13) Are there any family members or friends who have told you that they don't think doing well in school is important?

14) How did this affect you?

15) Have you had people who tell you they believe you can accomplish whatever you set your mind to?

Understanding Perceptions of Education

16) What kind of grades does someone have to get to be a good student?

17) How would you describe yourself as a student?

18) What kind of things keep students from doing well in school?

19) What is the long-term payoff of doing well in school?

Understanding Schooling Experiences

20) Do any of your high school teachers stand out to you as really good? Why?

21) Do any of your high school teachers stand out as keeping you from meeting your goals? If so, how?

22) Do you feel that teachers treat all students fairly?

23) Have you had any experiences in school, whether with teachers, friends, or someone else, that you feel have kept you from meeting your goals?

24) Do you feel as though your Lakota culture is valued within the school? (Why or why not?)

25) What could be done to make school better?

26) Are you involved in any school teams, groups, or organizations? If so, what kind of impact has this made on you?

27) Are you involved in any teams, groups, or organizations outside of school? What kind of impact has this made on you?

Examining Perceptions of Opportunity

28) I want to talk about the word success, as it tends to mean different things to different people. What does being a successful student mean to you?

29) What does it mean to you to if I said someone is successful in life?

30) In order to be successful, does it matter if someone goes to college? Why?

31) What do you see yourself doing 20 years from now? (Follow-up: Where would you be doing this?)

32) Are there any barriers that might keep you from meeting these goals?

33) In what ways do these long-term goals influence your work in school right now?

Appendix B: Codebook

School Context

Positive descriptors of School – Instances of students talking positively about their school.

Negative descriptors of School – Instances of students talking negatively about their school.

Culture in the School – Discussion of students of the way the school incorporates their culture, either in the classroom or in the school as a whole.

Academic Context of the School

Descriptors of Good Teachers – Discussion by students of either specific teachers in the school, or general qualities of what makes a good teacher.

Descriptors of Bad Teachers – Discussion by students of either specific teachers in the school, or general qualities of what makes a bad teacher.

Race Specific Discussions Around Teachers – Discussions about whether the race of the teacher impacts learning or the teacher's orientation towards their culture.

Academic Impact of Extra-Curricular Activities – Discussions of how participation in extra-curricular activities impacts the student's grades.

Social Impact of Extra-Curricular Activities - Discussions of how participation in extra-curricular activities impacts the student's social life and friend group.

View of Relationship Between Culture and Academics – This code is to be used for discussion by the student of the way the presence of their Lakota culture impacts their experiences within school, via both their grades and their state of mind.

Post-Secondary

Barriers to Post-Secondary Success – Factors that respondents describe as things that could prevent them from being successful after high school.

Post-Secondary Aspirations – Occupational hopes for the future, whether college related or not.

Post-Secondary Location – Where the respondent hopes to live 20 years from now.

Role of School in Post-Secondary Aspirations

Academic Preparation for College – Student's perceptions of their academic readiness for college.

Financial Preparation for College – Student's perceptions of the extent to which the school helped them be financially prepared and knowledgeable about paying for college.

College Knowledge – Student's perceptions of the extent to which the school discussed with them how to apply for college, what colleges are available to them, and important deadlines, such as when students need to be taking the ACT.

Social Context of the School

Social Impact of Extra-curricular Activities - Discussions of how participation in extra-curricular activities impacts the student's social experiences in school.

Community Context

Negative perceptions of Pine Ridge – Negative descriptors of the community offered by students.

Positive perceptions of Pine Ridge – Positive descriptors of the community offered by students.

Culture

Engagement in Cultural Activities – This category is to be used for when students discuss the ways they participate in their culture. Note: This is not to include the ways their parents or friends participate.

View of Culture by Respondent – How the student talks about their Lakota culture and their feeling of connectedness to it.

View of Culture by Others – How the student feels other significant actors in their life view their Lakota culture.

Influence of Others

Family Dynamics – Descriptors of the respondent's family.

Family's Role in Education – Discussion of the way the respondent's family influences their academic perspective and approach to school.

Friend Group Dynamics – Descriptor's of the respondent's friend group.

Friends' Role in Education - Discussion of the way the respondent's friend group influences their academic perspective and approach to school.

Influence on Siblings – Discussion of the way the respondent tries to influence their siblings to do better, generally used with younger siblings.

Support System – Evidence of the importance of others pushing academics. Note: This may overlap with Family's role in education, as well as Friend's role in education, and support from teachers.

Support from Teachers – Discussion of the way the respondent feels that teachers have supported his or her goals. This may be dual-coded with support system.

Personal Attributes

Background Information- This category contains information such as the student's GPA, grade, how long they've attended the school, etc.

Belief in Value of Education – Respondent discussion about their view of whether education matters.

Descriptors of Self as Student – Descriptions by respondents of how they believe others see them as a student, as well as whether they agree or disagree.

Locus of Control – Student's perceptions of whether their likely outcome is due to internal or external forces.

Positive Decision Making – Instances in which students talk about avoiding the factors that they suggested hold other people back.

Sources of Motivation and Decision-Making – Descriptions by respondents of both who and what push them to be successful.

Perceptions of Success/Failure

Factors that Shape Failure in School – Respondent's views of things that prevent themselves or other students from being successful in school.

Factors that Shape Success in School – Respondent's views of things that help themselves or other students be successful in school.

Factors that Shape Failure in School – Respondent's views of things that prevent themselves or other students from being successful in life.

Factors that Shape Success in School – Respondent's views of things that help themselves or other students be successful in life.

View of Importance of Race – Discussions of success or failure that focus specifically on the topic of race.

Definition of Academic Success – Respondent's definition of "success" from an academic standpoint. Note: This is more about how success is defined rather than what promotes that success.

Definition of Success in Life - Respondent definition of what would need to happen in order for them to feel as though they've had a successful life.

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