NAVIGATING MULTIPLE WORLDS BY DROPPING BACK INTO SCHOOL: URBAN YOUTH, SCHOOL POLICY AND RE-ENROLLMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

NAVIGATING MULTIPLE WORLDS WHILE DROPPING BACK INTO SCHOOL: URBAN YOUTH, SCHOOL POLICY AND RE-ENROLLMENT

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This study examines Black and Hispanic urban youth that "dropout" of school and return for a high school diploma. Using a mixed methods approach, Phase I uses Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling and Phase II incorporates a multiple case study of 16 students. Results of this study provides insight to the ways that returning urban high school students navigate in-school and out-of-school contexts. Furthermore, how they transitioned between the cultural norms and behavioral expectations of their neighborhood, school, and policy.

I dedicate this study to all the educators that are committed to serving at-risk youth in urban schools, and working on issues of social justice. I also dedicate this to the many students that have the courage, strength, and will-power to fight for a high school diploma.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> *"When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary".*
>
> Carter G. Woodson, 1969, p.21

Introduction

Since the publication of the Coleman Report (1964) and the implementation of No Child Left Behind (2001) America's public schools have been in a heightened state of reform, accountability, and assessment. Public discourse on the use of English-only policies coupled with unresolved debates on the Ethnic Studies Ban in Arizona, and use of disciplinary policies has added to the already turmoil condition of education for students of color. The 2008 election of Obama as the first Black President has garnered notions that racial inequality is no longer a social dilemma. Still, the K-12 academic performance of students of color has remained under educational surveillance. For urban youth of color, such zeroing in on their underperformance has been under more public scrutiny. Black and Hispanic urban students have been solidified as chronic underperformers, a menace to society, and the problem of K-12 institutions. The state of education for students of color remains dismal as Black students 17years of age are four years academically behind their white counterparts and have achievement in reading, United States History, and math trailing white 8th grade students (Harris, 2010). For Hispanic youth 8th grade reading scores lag behind whites and has remained stagnant (NAEP, 2011). Static academic growth, underfunded classrooms, and ill-qualified teachers in urban districts have led in an educational system that has generationally negated our most vulnerable at-risk children.

In 2009 the Alliance for Excellence in Education indicated that Black and Hispanic students account for "80% of the student population in extreme-poverty schools where 90 to 100% of the population is considered poor" (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2009, p.2). The prominent discourse of public school education for Black and Hispanic youth has been portrayed as a lost cause that is permanently irreversible. This has resulted in educational disengagement for Black and Hispanic youth that is constructed by "relationships, hierarchies of power and status, rules and normative practices and the regulation of students' bodies" (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009, p.221). The regulatory nature of schools is evident in how teachers interact with students, school culture, and policies that shape how students of color experience K-12 education. For Black and Hispanic youth that disproportionally leave high school without a diploma, they have been stigmatized as the lost generation (Beebe, 2007), behaviorally at-risk, emotionally troubled, and un-teachable. However, viewing students of color that are not graduating as a lost generation frames leaving without a diploma as an individualized decision not mediated by school and non-school factors. This includes factors that "exist in all life domains for example individual, family, school, community, and peer relations" (Christle et al., 2007, p.326). Black and Hispanic youth who seek early school withdrawal as an exit strategy have been America's forgotten promise. They are America's dropouts[1].

Problem Statement

America's dropouts are students that have left high school without a diploma and who are often the most marginalized, over-labeled as troublemakers, and that schools have

[1] The term *dropout is* italicized to reduce the stigmatizing label and negative connotations attached to youth that leave school without a diploma.

declared minimal educational obligation. No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation has increased public visibility of high school graduation rates and is a critical issue in education policy (Swanson, 2004). Consequently, literature suggests that there is uncertainty for policymakers and the general public on the scale and scope of who leaves school (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). The term dropout is italicized to reduce the stigmatizing label and negative connotations attached to youth that leave school without a diploma. Ambiguity in defining and measuring who dropouts has supported the act of leaving as an acceptable formality of weeding out the least qualified for a high school diploma. In 2011 approximately 1.2 million youth did not graduate with a high school diploma (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2011). The 2013 Building a Grad Nation report indicates that the national dropout rate is decreasing as more students are staying in school to graduation. However, such leveling off of students leaving high school masks the current state of education as "large graduation gaps remain in many states among students of different races, ethnicities, family incomes, disabilities, and limited English proficiencies" (America's Promise Alliance, 2013, p.5). In urban school districts with higher proportions of youth in poverty, graduation rates fall below 60% (Balfanz et al., 2010) where leaving school is perceived as a known yet untreated phenomenon.

Schools that have graduation rates approaching 50% have been termed by researchers at John Hopkins University (2004) as dropout factories. Dropout factories are labeled as predominately majority-minority with students performing below academic standards (Balfanz & Legters, 2004) and are primarily in urban areas. Although the number of dropout factories has been reduced, Black and Hispanic children largely attend these institutions. Moreover, "most of the decline in dropout factories from 2002 to 2008 occurred in suburbs

and towns" (Balfanz, et al., 2010, p.9) suggesting that urban schools are being impacted by dismal graduation rates. For students of color in low-income communities, this educational stalemate in developing effective programmatic efforts has been at the expense of their educational trajectory and their lives. With the Reauthorization of NCLB (2008) requiring states to report cohort or 4year graduation rates in meeting Annual Yearly Progress instead of 5-6year diploma completion (No Child Left Behind, 2008) prior reporting has overestimated graduation rates as less of an epidemic. It is "tantamount to treating a chronic illness with a manicure-pleasant, but ultimately pointless" (Balfanz & Legters, 2004, p.1) further intensifying long-term implications for students of color. Despite growing research examining dropout characteristics, outcomes, and prevention programs a vast majority of literature fails to disaggregate the term dropout viewing it without redress. Labeling students as dropouts has created a permanent identity that is socially and educationally stigmatized regardless of their academic outcome. Students that leave high school face insurmountable barriers that contest their educational matriculation as the act of leaving and agency in leaving is conflated as an individualized decision. Exclusive focus on the initial act of leaving school without consideration to longitudinal student outcomes provides a fragmented educational reality. This failure to adequately deconstruct dropout minimizes the resiliency of America's most at-risk children while reducing the obligation of institutions to address systematic ways that foster early school withdrawal.

Alteration of the dominant discourse in high school dropout literature necessitates a re-examination of the experiences of students that leave school without a diploma and return. Limited research has started to analyze the label dropout by looking at student re-enrollment behavior. Still, minimal data has been collected on students that return to school after leaving

(Berliner, Barrat, Fong, & Shirk, 2008). Entwisle et al. (2004) examination of youth that leave school without a diploma indicated there are temporary and permanent dropouts. Temporary dropouts are students that leave school and then re-enroll compared to permanent dropouts that leave school with the intention of never returning [2]. In many ways temporary and permanent dropouts have characteristics that differ before leaving school (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004). These differences were attributed to students' long-term educational objectives and their perceived utility of school in their lives. Students that leave school may choose to enroll in a General Education Diploma (G.E.D.) program, because it may appear to be more valuable than not having an equivalent diploma. For example, in comparison to permanent dropouts, temporary dropouts may leave the educational pipeline to obtain a G.E.D. or return back to high school. Entwisle et al. (2004) study explored the act of leaving school as a continual decision that youth re-construct in connecting back with public education. Yet, this pivotal decision is not holistically examined by current educational research.

Grand Question

A critical analysis of students who return to school after leaving is necessary as researchers' primarily conflate G.E.D. recipients with high school diploma completers (Altenbaugh, 1995; Bloom, 2009; Wayman, 2002). Examining youth that re-enroll separate from G.E.D. completion can highlight the experiences of students that return to public schools. This has various implications for districts as counting students that return can increase graduation rates. An assessment of who is returning to school and the type of schools

[2] The intent of students to re-enroll for temporary *dropouts* was not the focus but rather an assessment of the type of student that leaves and then returns.

that they leave and are placed is another area of current literature that requires assessment. Programs that serve returning students are available in a variety of institutions including alternative and traditional high schools (National High School Center, 2010) although less is known about student experiences in these institutions after returning. Particularly, for Black and Hispanic students who re-enroll. This study examines the grand question: What are the experiences of Black and Hispanic youth that return to high school for a diploma? Secondary questions include: What factors impact leaving high school? How do Black and Hispanic students adapt to being back in school? How do youth transition between multiple domains of the neighborhood and school? What resources are necessary for fostering their engagement and matriculation to a high school diploma? Without school districts preparing for returning Black and Hispanic youth educators, administrators, and policymakers will limit their ability to provide supportive academic environments for their students.

Research Questions

This study explores the experience of Black and Hispanic youth that return to high school for a diploma. Examining student narratives on individual, school, and neighborhood characteristics that impacted their withdrawal and subsequent return will provide insight to how youth transition between various out-of-school and in-school contexts. This study explores the following research questions:

1. What student, school, and neighborhood characteristics define the re-enrollment behavior of Black and Hispanic urban youth?
2. What adaptation strategies are used by returning Black and Hispanic urban youth to transition between cultural norms and behavioral expectations in their neighborhood and school?

3. How does school policy influence cultural norms and behavioral expectations of transitioning Black and Hispanic urban youth?

Background

Rationale for Study

Examining the narratives of returning students of color is critical in unmasking the lived experiences, challenges, and successes that they encounter in obtaining a high school diploma. The rationale for this study is three-fold. First, current high school dropout literature is based on that ideal that students leave school permanently rather than operating on a continuum. As the decision to leave high school is based on a long-term process of disengagement (Rumberger, 2001) uncertainty remains for whether returning to school is a time sensitive decision. Youth who re-enroll in school often operate on an in-between status (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002) where being labeled as dropouts may negatively impact whether their return is permanent. Researchers have explored various factors that contribute to students leaving school citing school factors (Rumberger, 2011), community (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Dew, 2007; Rumberger, 2004), and student engagement (Fredrick, Blumenfield, & Paris, 2004). However, these factors often operate under a dropout framework that shames the decision to leave. I argue that labeling youth as dropouts is a critical epistemological and inquiry-based gap in educational research.

Connotations attached to dropouts have higher stakes for Black and Hispanic youth whose graduation rates are approximately 50% (Orfield et al., 2004). I problematize the use of the term dropout and how schools depict Black and Hispanic youth who leave school as being outside the academic mainstream. To counter the use of the term dropout, Altenburgh (1995) uses high school leaver to capture students' exodus from the physical spaces of school

without attaching negative orientations to why they leave. Comparably, Tannenbaum (1966) uses the term early school withdrawal to describe students that leave school prior to graduation. Given that leaving school is a decision that is conditioned by various intersecting factors, I use the terms high school leaver and early school withdrawal instead of dropout to focus on the act of act of leaving or heir physical absence from the institution of school rather than the stigmatized identity that is often associated with exiting. I give consideration of the "multiple contextual and policy factors that interact over the lifetime of the student" (Mid-Atlantic Equity Center, 2009) that may be minimized with the use of simply a dropout classification.

Moreover, this study analyzes re-enrollment by focusing on agency in returning. I argue that taking this approach highlights the multifocal forms of resiliency rather than individual deficits of students, their parents, and their community. This perspective views external school conditions or student characteristics as reasons for academic disengagement. Viewing dropout as a fixed identity may not accurately capture the current state of youth in the American public school system specifically for Black and Hispanic children in urban schools. I argue that for countless students their re-enrollment behavior is often viewed as an anomaly where the student is perceived to have learned to alter their behaviors within the context of schooling. This leaves the dropout as the problem and further negatively portrays students as harnessing the inability to conform to school standards. For returning students, reasons for dropping out may counter or be instrumental in cultivating their return back to school. For example, Wayman (2002) asserts that previous researchers use a dropout typology and "have been able to identity factors associated with dropping out and have analyzed variables, hypothesizing that dropouts who do not fit the profile are more likely to

return" (p. 4). Using a "dropout typology" to describe students of color may still overlook differences in how youth may respond and interpret individual factors, school, and neighborhood contexts in unique ways. Tannenbaum (1966) argues:

> "There can be no simple type-casting of all dropouts to distinguish them from those who finish school. The act of leaving school is a symptom of varied personal and social conditions--as skin rash is a visible sign of any number of aliments. Suffers from skin rash differ widely in precipitating diseases and allergies; likewise, dropouts can be classified by afflictions so diverse that it is impossible to subsume all victims under a single causality" (p.7).

Students that permanently leave school may have similar characteristics to those that stay or that exit temporarily. Traditional methods for understanding the motivations and characteristics of high school leavers may fail to comprehensively address Black and Hispanic urban youth that leave school only to return permanently to receive a high school diploma.

Locating School Returners

A second rationale for this study is to examine student characteristics of who returns to school and the various experiences of Black and Hispanic urban youth within divergent schooling contexts. The Diplomas Count: Second Chances (2013) report contends that revisions in upcoming G.E.D. exams with increasing costs of testing that teachers are encouraging students to return to high school for traditional diplomas. I analyze individual student characteristics, school, and neighborhood factors to understand how urban youth of color re-enroll. I contend that knowing their experiences within these contexts is vital to strengthening the educational pipeline for urban youth once they return. I use mixed methods to examine the re-enrollment of Black and Hispanic youth in an urban school district through case study. Using mixed methods allowed me to understand how various aspects influenced

the enrollment and sustainability of the students in the study as they transitioned and navigated their re-entry back to school. Analyzing factors that shape why students leave school, why they returned, and how they are able to reconfigure themselves back into school underscores the role of resiliency and courage plays in the educational pursuits for at-risk students of color.

Student Voice

An additional consideration for this study is to highlight student voice, and to examine how at-risk urban youth of color navigate their new schooling terrain. Rodriguez & Brown (2009) contend that student voice underscores that "young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education" (p.22). Consequently, within high school dropout literature student voice is often limited and devalued. In particular research on early school withdrawal in urban districts mutes the narratives of students of color, low-income students, and those who underperform academically in urban contexts (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). Moreover, and the voices of Hispanic youth silenced. Students of color hold a unique position in the classroom, because their "status as children and students only partially explains their relative powerlessness in schools, which cannot be fully understood or addressed without making connections to the wider context of social inequality" (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009, p.22). Excluding student voice in high school dropout research overlooks how these students experience school while providing limited scope and understanding to the type of interventions and support systems that are necessary to foster their academic progress. How students make sense of their return, unsaid rules of school, and their understanding of how educators perceive of them in the

classroom will continue to impact their matriculation. This study includes student narratives to underscore their voices, in their words, while being inclusive of individual agency in telling their stories.

Policy Implications

Another motivation for this study is to analyze the role of policy in shaping the experiences of students when they re-enroll. As students are returning into K-12 public schools, teachers and administrators may have challenges in re-conceptualizing how they once perceived of students left the classroom. Comparatively, returning youth will have to meet core policy requirements including evidence for residency, health records, parental permission, and academic entrance requirements that can constrain their re-entry. Analyzing how students cope with re-enrollment policy can additionally shed light to structural barriers in returning to school youth. This can aid in the development of policies structured to support their entrance and transition.

Despite the youth returning to school for a diploma minimal research has been collected on dropout recovery. A 2008 study conducted by WestEd indicated a 49.4% reentry rate for Black students in San Bernardino, California demonstrating that "dropout events can be a temporary interruption rather than a permanent high school outcome" (Berliner et al., 2008, p. iv). Another study by Bridgeland et al. (2006) indicated "74% of dropouts claimed that they would have stayed in school if they could relive the experience and 76% said that they would re-enroll in a high school for people their age if they could (Wilkins, 2011). Few researchers have examined the narratives of urban students of color that participate in dropout recovery programs or that simply return back to school. Moreover, limited data is "routinely collected on students who return to education after dropping out, there is little information on

the types of programs that have the best holding power" (Wilkins, p. 1, 2011). This study takes a critical step in analyzing attributes of students that disappear from the classroom only to return, and how schools can incorporate retention measures that support them until they graduate (Berliner et al., 2008). Moreover, educational researchers will need to implement policies for adequately assessing and defining this growing population. How policy is interpreted and disseminated can play a vital role in whether youth stay after returning.

Significance of Study

This study questions current measures of how high school dropout is defined while aiming to uncover how schooling and policy can systemically improve education. For urban districts the focus on dropout rates is essential. High school dropout rates are disproportionally higher in urban districts and with students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds rates increase dramatically (Lagana, 2004). Examining the experiences of Black and Hispanic youth in these settings can serve to re-engage a rising subgroup of students that are leaving without a diploma. By focusing on the re-enrollment behavior of urban youth this study seeks to make several contributions to high school dropout research and policy. First, there are various social implications for students returning for a diploma. In terms of earnings research suggests that high school dropouts earn approximately $260,000 less over their lifetime compared to an individual with a diploma (Wise, 2008). On average, a student that leaves school without a diploma costs the United States approximately $209,000 over his or her lifetime (Wise, 2008) in public assistance and involvement in the criminal justice system. There are not only individual costs of decreased graduation rates but social costs as well. Limited employment opportunities are available and youth pose higher rates of involvement in criminal activity and use of welfare services. Furthermore, the generational cycle of

families and communities with high rates of dropping out create environments that are more likely to be educationally hazardous.

Second, this study presents a contemporary approach to discourse on how graduation rates are calculated. At a macro-level No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation created a hyperawareness of high school graduation rates because states have an obligation to report such data in determining Adequate Yearly Progress (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007). This data is disaggregated by year, school level, gender, and race. However, the way federal legislation currently defines graduation rates is based a "four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class" (No Child Left Behind, 2008, p.2). Students that return to school yet fail to graduate with their cohort or up to five years after entering 9th grade are excluded from such analysis. I argue that this approach limits public schools' educational responsibility and interest in investing in youth for intrinsic benefits alone. Instead, the decision to return becomes an isolated choice without schools' involvement in mediating the process. If returning students are not counted and legitimized within graduation rates, it becomes a token of minimal obligation to assist students in graduating.

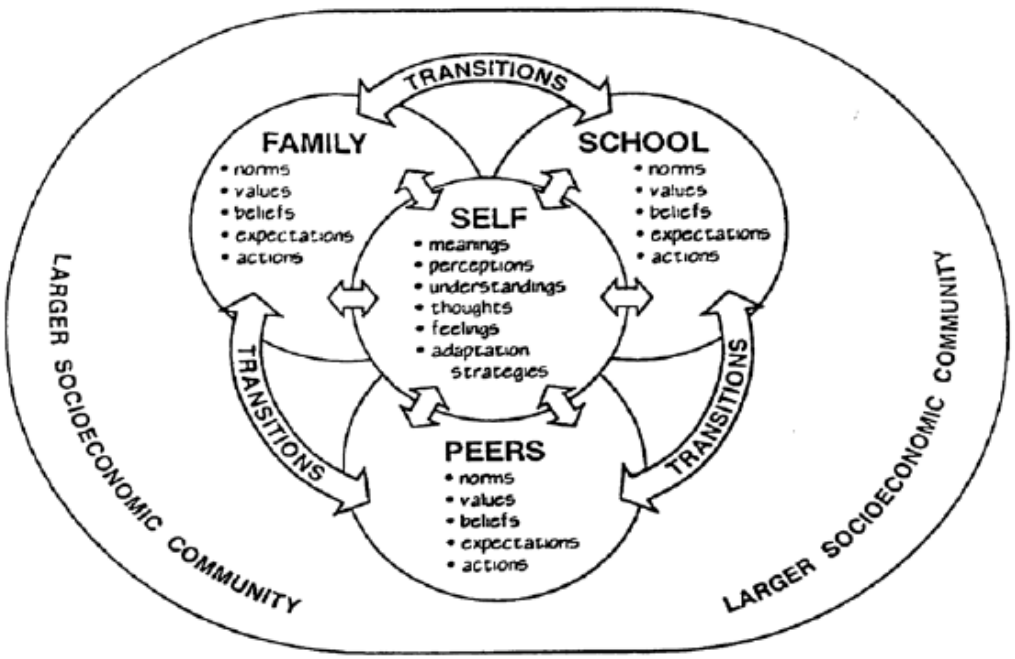
Furthermore, examining the re-enrollment behavior of urban youth provides insight to measures that educators and principals can use to assist students in their out-of-school to in-school transition. This is imperative as students and teachers will be challenged in how they are able to adapt to the changing circumstances of the classroom. Findings from this study will aid in developing pragmatic tools, training, and programs for schools to address the person rather than their past behavior. When students return to school after dropping out, they

are undertaking more than a personal risk. They are often taking an emotional risk that may not be perceived as academically advantageous. Therefore, it is critical for researchers and educators to examine this growing population. This exploratory analysis seeks to deepen discourse on the experiences and narratives of Black and Hispanic students that return to high school.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Phelan, Davidson, & Cao (1991) Students' Multiple Worlds Model to provide a micro-level analysis of Black and Hispanic urban youth navigate the self, school, and their neighborhood after their withdrawal and return. Phelan et al. (1991) examine the socio-cultural context of how students transition through the multiple worlds of the self, family, peers, school, and how they navigate the boundaries and borders of these worlds. How urban youth of color experienced school, subsequent return, and strategies that they use to cope with re-entry are critical to whether they stay permanently or leave again. Focusing on social interactions and interpersonal relationships between students' home life, school policy, and peers provides needed contextual considerations to youth academic engagement or disengagement (Phelan et al., 1998). The core of the Students' Multiple Worlds is how the self is positioned within various social settings. The Students' Multiple Worlds Typology is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Students' Multiple Worlds Model



The re-enrolled student possesses certain emotional connectedness, ways of adaption, and perceptions that are negotiated within the multiple worlds of family, peers, and school. How students make sense of themselves is mediated by divergent social settings that exist outside of the self and is conditioned by transitional points determined by the context. How students perceive of themselves in school after their withdrawal is influenced by their beliefs, educational aspirations, and value placed on school. Phelan et al. uses multiple worlds to examine "the individual as mediator and integrator of meaning and experience in contrast to single context approaches which compartmentalize aspects of students' lives" (Phelan et al., 1998, p.3). This approach underscores individual agency in students' lived experiences and provides an exploratory analysis of how youth transition between varying contexts. As students return to school how they are able to interpret boundaries that may be easily permutable compared to borders that pose challenges that will ultimately influence whether

they stay. Re-enrolled students may perceive the institution of schooling as a boundary that can be permeated. Therefore they return to school with the expectation of reaching graduation day. However, at the micro-level of school returning youth can find borders within the schooling context that they must learn to navigate. These borders can be reshaped within other worlds as peer contacts, school policy, staff, and family as all elements may change over time. Students' Multiple Worlds Typology is a theoretical framework that can be used to capture students' sense of belongingness in schools while analyzing how they transition within various worlds. Furthermore, to understand whether students adapt or resist the values, beliefs, customs, and normalities of the worlds that they encounter. This allows the transition itself to be a primary factor in examining re-enrollment behavior of youth. During the transitional process, Phelan et al. contend that how students adapt and define each world or domain varies depending on an individual's agency in the navigational process. Four types of student typologies are discussed. Also, how students may navigate multiple worlds. Type I describes students who are in congruent worlds as they have smooth transitions between family, peers, and school. This type of student was able to acquire and decipher the cultural and social expectations of various social contexts. Having a more effective transition allows the student to be able to perform academically. Type II typology incorporates youth that have incongruence between worlds where values and beliefs differ between social contexts. However, students classified as Type II are able to manage perceived boundaries of the various worlds.

Type III typology are youth whose worlds were not congruent. Boundaries for Type III are classified as hazardous or perceived to be detrimental to one's sense of self. Inability to transition between the multiple worlds directly impacts how students are able to navigate

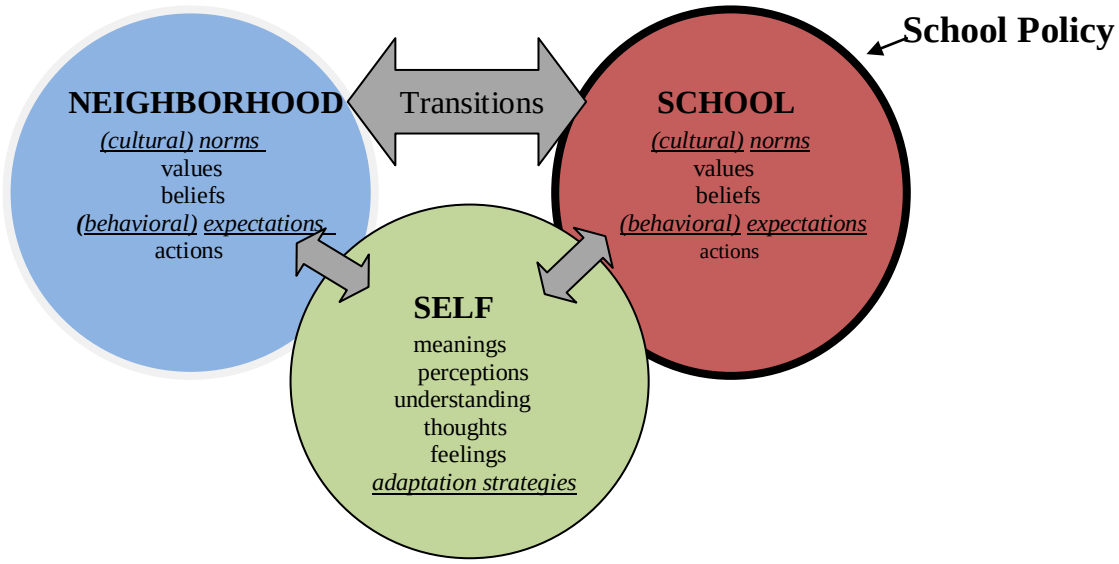
and their sustainability to performing academically. Youth classified as Type III encounter varying values and customs that may appear in opposition to the other worlds. Lastly, students classified as Type IV typology are not able to transition between borders or boundaries that they encounter. These students have difficulty entering and exiting different social contexts due to differences in the core norms that counter other worlds. Students in this category become disengaged with school and are often labeled as dropouts. Examining the Type IV student[3] is a critical component of this study as youth that are classified under this type are often viewed in an identity framework that fails to address their re-engagement or re-constitution within school.

This study incorporates Students' Multiple World Typology to provide insight to how students transition back to school by examining the self, school including policy, and neighborhood. The boundaries and borders that students encounter after returning can be reshaped based on individual interpretation of the context. Re-enrolled dropouts may have different peer groups compared to prior school leaving or the self may be redefined in how one responds to particular situations. School policy and its influence on individual perceptions of one's ability to transition in multiple realms is a critical domain to consider. Due to the absence of the neighborhood as a domain that students can transition, this study makes an addition to this model. However, since this study seeks to specifically analyze school and neighborhood transitions these two domains will primarily be examined as presented in Figure 2. Within the domain of the self the focus is on adaptation strategies. A

[3] The Type IV student is a framework that can be applied to students of various racial and/or ethnic groups. The study uses this theoretical framework in relation to how Black and Hispanic students transition between multiple worlds.

key focus is on the cultural norms and behavioral expectations of the neighborhood and school with school policy acting as a border or boundary for returning youth.

Figure 2: Study's Theoretical Framework Model



The Type IV student is a framework that can be applied to students of various racial and/or ethnic groups. This study uses this theoretical framework in relation to how Black and Hispanic students transition between multiple worlds. In many cases school values, expectations, and norms that returning students will encounter will be unfamiliar to them (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). The ways that returning youth interpret school policy can play a critical role in how they perceive themselves after they return. Comparatively, how the self thinks about school can change after a student re-enrolls. I argue that examining these factors is imperative to understanding students' experiences and re-enrollment behaviors. How they transition between school and neighborhood contexts directly influences whether they will reach graduation day.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Classification as a Dropout

Prior to 19th century, mass education in the average student in the United States was upper socioeconomic status and white male. Educational opportunity was openly available to White males whose parents owned land and excluded non-whites. Racial and class based exemption from compulsory schooling allowed white male youth to attend school based on individual choice rather than by policy regulation. In 1900 approximately 90% of males failed to graduate high school (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). During this era, receipt of a high school diploma was not mandatory for individuals to receive an acceptable and profitable household income. Consequently, as the influx of immigrant populations in the United States grew entering the 1900's from 500,000 to 2.4 million twenty years later, and totaling 6.5 million entering into 1940 (Neisser et al., 2001) schools were presented with immediate challenges in meeting the academic, social, and teaching needs of this new subpopulation of students. Public schools could not absorb the implementation of mass schooling at the classroom level.

The period between 1910-1940 was termed the "high school movement" as immigrant populations and African Americans aged children increased in America's classrooms. The Civil Rights and World War II Era in 1940-1970 spurred a growth in accountability standards for schools and the public citizenry. Efforts to reduce dropout rates were partly achieved through the induction of youth in the armed forces. Research reports suggest that during World War II students that left school without a diploma joined the military (Schargel & Smink, 2001) reducing the national rate of youth graduating without a diploma from earlier centuries. Entering into the 1960's the notion of dropping out became a social issue as

compulsory education laws were implemented at a national level. As immigrant subpopulations were assimilated into American public schools, increasing concerns about who is receiving a diploma became more paramount. In educational research the "number of articles discussing dropouts increased, with titles using the word dropout in particular dominating periodical literature after 1965" (Dorn,1993, p.354). This occurred simultaneously as the percentage of students leaving high school mounted. Compared to research literature, social discourse on early school withdrawal focused on the inability of youth to succumb to the rules and regulations of schools. In 1965 sociologist Lucius Cervantes cited public sentiments on dropouts:

> "It is from this hard core of dropouts that a high proportion of the gangsters, hoodlums, drug-addicted, government-dependent prone, irresponsible and illegitimate parents of tomorrow will be predictably recruited" (Neisser, et al., 2001, p.11).

Negative connotations attached to the label of dropout created a social frenzy where teachers, administrators, and the general public questioned the utility of compulsory schooling given that there was a high proportion of disadvantaged youth choosing to not attend school. For non-white students, there were racial disparities in dropout rates decreased dramatically. Researchers assert "this narrowing of the gap relates to the saturation effect" (Neisser et al., 2011, p.12). The saturation effect of in Hispanic and African American students remaining in school resulted in a recalculation of students of color as staying in rather than being in an "in-between status" (Neisser et al., 2011, p.12). Non-white youth were returning to school to receive a diploma through various pathways including G.E.D and alternative education diplomas. In 1965, U.S. graduation rates were near 75% (Weis et al., 1989) and represented students that were attending irregularly.

Public dialogue on who does not graduate largely implicated non-Whites and low-income communities as the source the problem. In the 1980's, researchers examined early school withdrawal taking several approaches. First, literature during this period suggested that the act of leaving school was individually motivated and coerced by one's social network. Primarily, educational research and discourse focused on the "deviant's" choice to leave the well-crafted, caring, and equitable school system. Growth in the percentage of youth graduating from high, feed into the portrayed of students that left as the problem since schools were successful in graduating majority of youth (Weis et al., 1989). If the school was fulfilling its broader mission of educational opportunity, being unable to succeed was attributed to the individual rather than to educators or the larger K-12 institution. The student became the primary focus of leaving school rather than the co-construction of their behavior.

Researchers additionally included race and income as focal points for the typology of high school leavers. Literature asserts that delinquent was equated with dropout and dropout with poor or African American. Dorn (1993) argues:

> "What was striking about the dropout debate was its flexibility, the way in which the same issue could provoke some to moral outrage over middle-class dropouts while others felt that poor dropouts presented a menace. A significant proportion of articles may have assumed that African American dropouts were more dangerous to society than other dropouts, but the literature as a whole was not inherently class or race based. It was however, plastic enough that contemporary prejudices seeped into it" (Dorn, 1993, p.367).

The growing polarization of a non-Whites and poor as the dropout typology has influenced how researchers have historically examined this issue. The classification of youth as educationally illegitimate to harbor in America's classrooms has remained the dominant paradigm for high school leavers. High school leavers was cited as having a lack of interest in education and career options as society begin to label students at-risk. The accumulation of

being labeled at-risk and the dehumanizing stigma place on youth that dropout creates a permanent yet stratified positioning for them school. For many students, schools proclaim the message that once you leave you can never return. Mounting social apathy for students that leave school has been a driving force behind current philosophies of early school withdrawal. This has led to the persistence of epistemologies that perpetuate the legacy of abandonment by public schools of at- risk children.

Evolution of High School Dropout Literature

Contemporary research literature has analyzed factors shaping why students leave high school from three perspectives: (1) school factors including teacher pedagogy and culture, (2) community and neighborhood effects, and (3) individual characteristics that place students at- risk. How students are able to navigate their out-of-school experiences is dependent on the interconnectedness between the self, school, and the community. These considerations ultimately influence whether students of color graduate with a diploma.

School Based Factors

The type of school setting, culture, and climate that youth are educated can create academic environments modeled after tolerance or inclusiveness. School factors that influence graduation rates include access to social capital, geographic location, and student composition (Rumberger, 2001) making the spaces of school a critical component in youth connectivity to their education. Lee & Burkam (2000) suggest that school culture and practice are mechanisms that push youth out of school. These push out factors include pedagogy, interpersonal relationships, and policies implemented by administrators and school personnel that provides divergent disciplinary actions and school expectations. The decision to leave is co-constructed by school actors as students of color in urban contexts are eliminated from the

educational pipeline. In Fine's (1991) study of African American and Latino students in New York, 20% of students cited that they were pushed out of school not including whether they actually desired to leave. Fine suggests that high school leavers experienced traumatic family circumstances and academic problems, but felt "forced out because of unresponsive institutional arrangements" (Fine, 1991 p. 79). Essentially, schools operate as mechanisms for sorting out unwanted students from the general mainstream and established normality embedded within its corridors. The institution of education and the spaces of school are measures utilized for devaluing students of color, their behaviors, and cultural differences. Accepted students become those that fit its intended purpose and have proven diploma worthy. Youth operating outside of this ideal are simply intellectually disregarded and disposed.

As students become academically disengaged, educators will often consider youth labeled as at-risk to be unwanted intruders within the classroom. There is a threat of physical intrusiveness that is equated with certain behavioral acts and communication styles from students of color. This acceptance or rejection of student cultural and social cues of urban youth who are demonstrating characteristics of at-riskness are perceived by educators as heinous, aggressive, and unfit to be educated. Ferguson (2001) asserts that students of color, particularly Black and Latino males are adultified where verbal dialogues can be construed by educators as menacing behavior (Ferguson, 2001). Constructed behavioral expectations of students of color are not only regulated but are cultured by public schools. Culturing youth to fit within good student ideals can minimize their participation or highlight their attitudes and achievement as overtly negative.

Carter (2008) study of Black students in predominately White schools contends that youth perceived they were racially spotlighted by teachers in the classroom. Educators racially spotlighted youth through their hyperawareness of Black students to police their actions and mannerisms. This policing came to the expense of their engagement and ability to be positively highlighted academically. Despite Carter's focus on Black students in predominately white schools, "students of all achievement levels report wrestling with race-related worries in the classroom" (Carter, 2008, p.231) placing urban students who leave without a diploma under more critical academic alarm. There is a coupling effect of how educators perceive the performance of youth behavior, and how such characteristics of the performer are then validated by schools. Power dynamics can elevate within the classroom between students of color, educators, and administrators making the spaces of school a battle ground for winning a diploma. Navigation then becomes impossible.

How teachers and administrators enact school policy and practices further contribute to why students leave school. Youth of color are encouraged to leave through the enforcement of "explicit policies and conscious decisions that cause students to involuntarily withdrawal" where the focus is on the "school's own agency, rather than that of the student, in producing dropouts" (Valenzuela, 2002, p. 128). The act of leaving becomes the pathway for students of color rather than an educational alternative. For Hispanic students that are disengaged it is based on an accumulation of a cultural stripping of one's identity through classroom practices, curriculum, and pedagogical stances that garner their withdrawal permanently. Valenzuela's (1999) study of Mexican American youth in Texas indicated that students were culturally and socially detached from their ethnic heritage by the structure of the space of schooling. The concept of subtractive schooling examines how individual actors

collectively minimize who the student is to become with what schools socially desire. Lack of teacher caring for students and integration of their personal histories made school a separate place from one's community. Carter (2005) contends that the silencing of students of color is often a result of the appraisal of cultural capital by teachers and administrators. Youth considered outsiders embody characteristics of non- dominant cultural capital that schools overtly reject. The accumulation of school based factors including teacher pedagogy, curriculum, and policy shape how youth feel accepted or excluded.

This leads to the decision to leave school for students of color as an only option to re-gain acceptance and to return to a state of educational reprieve. Researchers have further assessed the role of school structure and discipline in shaping the decision to leave school. Schools operate under strict accountability for students, disproportional disciplinary action, and reduced teacher inclusive of youth (Lagana, 2004) that create environments for students that are contesting their academically success. Lack of adequate resources compared to suburban districts has placed schools more at-risk then the students that they serve. The recent publication of dropout factories has made visible the nested nature of schools that produce high proportions of youth that leave without a diploma. Dropout factories account for approximately 2,000 high schools and have a disproportionate percentage of students of color in low-income districts. These schools have low promoting power of students in a given cohort with approximately 50% of students entering as freshman failing to graduate (Christle et al., 2007). With higher proportions of students of color attending dropout factories compared to their white and Asian counterparts, literature assessing the role of school factors has provided insight to the experiences of youth in these settings. Still, this causes into

question mechanisms used by educators, administrators, and staff to ensure that a segment of our student population is no longer a determinant to schools.

Rumberger & Rodriquez' (2002) study of Chicano student graduation rates describe school factors as "institutional, processes, and structures that provide the context for the educational experiences of actual and potential dropouts" (Valenzuela, 2002, p.122). These factors intersect with various social institutions including the community and family that perpetuate the ability of schools to educationally dispose of students. The politics of schools including teacher pedagogy, lack of culturally relevant curriculum, and deficit thinking, create negative learning environments that are counterproductive. Explicit policies and practices directly influence who stays and who leaves. Specifically, policies and practices including school size and racial composition can encourage youth to become disengaged due to structural barriers in creating a sense of belonging for students (Valenzuela, 2002). The structural components of schools creates a climate where leaving without a high school diploma is the norm and expectation for Black and Hispanic urban youth.

The type of culture validated in schools impacts the interpersonal relationships that students have with teachers and administrators. Research has examined the role of deficit models on graduation rates in urban communities. Deficit thinking presupposes that disadvantaged youth will be less likely to succeed in educational spaces due to individual and neighborhood characteristics. In this way, schools bare no obligation. Essentially at-risk students are too at-risk to be helped. It is depicted as a losing game. Literature on high school leavers in the late 1980's largely depicted urban youth as troubled and un-teachable (Weiner, 2000). The deficit paradigm "blamed the victim and ignored the host of social, political, and institutional factors undercutting school success for students labeled as deprived and

disadvantaged"(Weiner, 2000, p.371). Focusing on school factors highlights the influence of educational institutions in fostering the educational demise of youth (Fine, 1986; Finn, 1989; Bodwitch, 1993; Lee & Burkam, 2003; McNeal, 1997). Without this counternarrative, schools continue to systematically blame children for not meeting classroom standards. Simply, schools implicitly assert that they have no responsibility in graduating all, only a small majority of students.

The use of alternative schools in repurposing the actual number of students that leave school without a diploma as an intervention strategy has been widely debated (Dunbar, 2001; Franklin et al., 2007; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Reimer & Cash, 2003). The type of schools that students attend including traditional or alternative schooling contexts can play a role in the structure of academic content delivered and in how youth matriculate. Despite growing percentages of alternative schools reaching approximately 10,900 with 612,900 students (NCES, 2010) there remains limited literature on the influence of these institutions. Consequently, with increased growth of alternative schools there has been a minimal amount of research on evaluation, assessment, and graduation rates (Gilson, 2006). Minimal research on the type of schools that graduate students remains a negated consideration in the field. However, the imperativeness of this focus remains for urban students of color. Another school factor that has impacted graduation rates are the use of Zero Tolerance Policies. Alternative schools have been utilized as dumping grounds for students that are expelled or suspended and labeled as having behavioral and emotional problems. Social dialogue has constructed alternative schools to be reserved for abandoned youth who are at-risk, educational delinquents, and have issues of performance within the classroom (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Still, the use of alternative schools to serve as an educational option for

students that have left without a diploma is mixed. This study examines school type in increasing graduation rates for Black and Hispanic youth to understand how they experience school. Moreover, how these students navigate in-school and out-of-school environments.

Community Factors

In examining factors that influence graduation rates literature has additionally assessed the role of communities and out-of-school factors. The neighborhoods that students inhabit foster certain beliefs, value systems, and capital that can cause clashes in the classroom. Research on neighborhood effects is well documented (Ainsworth, 2002; Crane, 1991; Jencks, 1991; Mayer & Jencks). A large body of literature on neighborhood effects and graduation rates has examined (1) cultural and social capital and (2) pull out factors. Crane's (1991) study on neighborhood effects, pregnancy, and dropout rates for Black, Hispanic, and White youth indicated that teenagers residing in metropolitan cities categorized as "unsafe" have higher probabilities of leaving school without a diploma. It is hypothesized that urban districts in particular, provide students with negative social and cultural capital that counters expectations and behavioral norms. Carter's (2001) assessment of dominant and non-dominant cultural capital and informal knowledge that students acquire from socialization practices established in the home and neighborhood shaped how youth came to understand the purpose of schooling in their lives. The type of neighborhood including parental income levels, unemployment, and presence of criminal activity is theorized to produce ways of knowing that are undervalued by schools and behaviors that are deemed intolerable. Schools legitimize cultural norms and standards that are expected of youth to earn the right to an education. For students of color unable to meet this value latent objective they are ruled out by schools for any act as grounds for educational termination.

Although school is a major institution that youth encounter, non-school factors additionally impact how students are conditioned on a daily basis. Other factors include: peer relationships, social policy, and parent education. Including non-school factors the institution of school "is the most proximal socializing agent available to convey societal norms and prohibitions" (Kasen et al., 1998, p. 50). However, the role of non-school factors has been associated with creating negative environments for students with behaviors that are transmitted within classrooms. Kasen et al (1998) examination of adolescent dropouts, pregnancy, and deviant behavior indicated that youth who exhibited at-risk characteristics were in "serious criminal activities, an unstable employment record, drug and alcohol abuse, broken relationships, poor parenting, and a generally poor quality of life have been related to engaging in deviant activities" (Kasen et al., 1998, p.69). Consequently, this study equates deviant behavior with the act of leaving school and is patterned after traditional research ideology. Despite this consideration focusing on the environmental conditions that form the typology of a high school leaver can provide insight to factors that play a role in academic and out-of-school barriers for urban students of color.

Ecological conditions of neighborhoods and resources available to students and whose social networks are open or closed additionally play a role in graduation rates. Coleman's theory of social capital has been used to examine how formal and informal channels influence the transfer of information that exists within a network. This social network includes peers, parents, schools, and individuals in the community. When information is enclosed within a system, the actors within it are provided limited information that may not be accurate. For urban students of color challenged by the decision to leave school whether educators or out-of-school peers encourage them to stay is dependent on their access to this information.

Coleman describes this concept as social closure. The "closure of the social structure is important not only for the existence of effective norms but also for another form of social capital: the trustworthiness of social structures that allows the proliferation of obligations and expectations" (Coleman, 1988, p.107). Individuals within a given community of peers will be privy to certain types of information, opportunities, knowledge, and aspirations that can ultimately impact whether youth stay in school. Teachman (1996) examined the influence of social capital on the probability of graduating from high school. The study incorporates data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 25,000 eighth graders and followed their enrollment status to tenth grade as well as including parent-child interaction surveys. Parents were asked how often they spoke with their children about school, contacted school, Catholic school attendance, marital status, and mobility. The results of the study indicated that parent and school relationships in addition to parent and child consecutiveness did not conclusively explain student enrollment rates or the influence of family organization (Techman et al., 1996). However, few studies have assessed the role of parent engagement at home, specifically social capital on graduation rates for urban students of color more directly.

Another body of research asserts that neighborhood factors and parental background can pull youth out of school. Pull-out theorists argue the decision to leave school is conditioned and made by youth ultimately where the appropriate choice is to leave school due to out-of-school factors. This conceptual framework presumes youth make a holistic analysis of whether to leave or stay (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). The act of leaving is viewed as a rational decision that is coerced by external school factors. Youth may decide to leave school due to family illness, to assist with living conditions, employment, support the management of a family business, or for gang related issues. For students that are pulled out of school by

external factors, the decision to leave may be challenging. As schools regulate who consistently attends by pushing youth out its doors, research suggests that students in neighborhoods that are viewed as at-risk pose to encounter aspects that pull them out simultaneously. An additional pull out factor includes community violence that creates fear for youth who resist leaving school. This produces a contentious situation for students who are trapped within the cyclical pattern of underachievement. Yet, how urban students of color balance the requirements of school and their family life may be difficult and ultimately lead to their decision to exit school. Limited research has focused on the negotiation process that students inhabit and continuously reconstruct. Developing more qualitative and quantitative studies can provide necessary understanding to this topic and assist in imparting comprehensive measures that bridge school, community, and the individual to rather than in opposition of receiving a diploma.

Individual Factors

The transition from an academically disengaged student to early school withdrawal has been well cited in research (Fine, 1991; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger, 2011). Students that leave school face numerous social challenges that are assumed to be based on actions orchestrated by the individual. Literature on individual factors that shape the decision to leave have focused on (1) student behavior, (2) school transitions, and (3) racial disproportionality in graduation rates.

Student Behavior

Youth behavior has been a key aspect examined by researchers as contributing to graduation rates where student characteristics place students at-risk of leaving school without a diploma. One area of research has analyzed student background characteristics including

truancy, suspensions and/or expulsions, and being overage for grade. Being overage for grade has been attributed to leaving school for students who repeat courses are behind academically and socially in school. Still, overall effects of grade retention and being overage have not been fully distinguished. Rodrick's (1994) meta-analysis of grade retention and dropping out indicated these two concepts are often viewed synonymously which may over or underestimate its causal effect. Recent efforts to distinguish between grade retention and being overage for grade have provided insight to student backgrounds that contribute to graduation rates.

Jameson et al. (2002) meta-analysis of dropout literature and grade retention cited a "significant link between prior grade retention and dropping out" (Stearns et al., 2007, p.210). As students are retained they are less likely to be academically engaged and their educational experience becomes one that places them behind their original cohort. In many ways, the field has approached dropping out and social promotion as a transgression that is not guaranteed but rather students have to earn to be moved to the next grade level. For urban students of color that are required to repeat a grade they are often placed at an educational disadvantage and experience more disciplinary issues (Stearns et al., 2007). Rodrick & Nagaoka (2005) study of Chicago's social promotion policy, high-stakes testing, and graduation rates concluded that student underperformance on state tests puts them at risk of failure and effects their self-esteem producing academic disengagement. This study contends that Chicago student retention is one factor in a variety of conditions that can lead to leaving school. However, retaining students failed to increase student achievement and promotion power. The influence of grade retention and being overage for grade can influence graduation rates for urban students of color, but has not been viewed as the primary contributor.

Another body of literature has assessed the influence of suspensions and expulsion policies and truancy on graduation rates. For Black or Hispanic youth who are suspended or expelled from school the decision to leave is often viewed by researchers as an individual problem issue of discipline. A 2009 study of graduation rates of students in urban districts and the juvenile justice system examined the role of criminal activity and leaving school by assessing arrests in predicting dropping out. The study used data from Chicago Public Schools modeled in a multi-level logistic regression to examine (1) freshman and sophomore years of high school, and (2) dropping out from surveys of behavior, school climate, and youth attitudes. Results showed "juvenile justice interventions is another way out of high school; official intervention weakens participation in school in the inner city and, by extension, the social mobility and control potential of educational institutions" (Hirschfield, 2009, p.385). For Black and Hispanic urban students the impact of being pushed out and pulled out by juvenile justice institutions makes staying in school more of a challenge. The use of juvenile justice institutions in creating the school-to-prison pipeline is another alternative in explaining graduation rates, particularly in urban districts. Educators asserting the school-to-prison pipeline as an outlet for pushing students out of school not only decide who stays and who goes but are able to validate the mass exodus of students from school to the streets. Urban youth are given a pathway that does not lead to educational success, but instead their elimination from public schools.

The school-to-prison pipeline and its relation to Zero Tolerance Policies have amplified how youth are pushed out of school through the perception of student behavior in the classroom. The use of Zero Tolerance Policies in deconstructing student behaviors as delinquent has been an instrument for promoting the connection of school to prison. The

hyperawareness and policing of Black and Hispanic youth in hallways, classrooms, and on school grounds has fed into the creation of a political necessity for controlling children that counter school culture. Zero Tolerance Policies created a tactic for focusing on safety due to heightened school violence (Insley, 2001). However, the issue of creating safe spaces in schools has resulted in vast variability in its ultimate application to include students that commit serious incidents with others that are punished for insubordination or that have a perceived threat (Dunbar & Villarruel, 2002). The use of Zero Tolerance Policies is imperative to how Black and Hispanic youth experience schools and in methods used by educators to remove students from traditional public school settings. Although the use of Zero Tolerance Policies has been a tactical measure to remove students "the impact of these draconian policies on the school dropout problem has been downplayed or ignored" (Dupper, 2010, p.68) even though this plays a critical role in why students leave school and impacts their positionality in the classroom.

School Transitions

Researchers have additionally examined the role of the transitional process for students from middle to high school and their ability to cope with the 8th and 9th grade bridge. The Consortium on Chicago Research indicates that 9th grade is a predicator of students' interest in remaining in school (Cohen, 2009). Noted as achievement loss students during this period often lack the supportive services that can foster their academic growth. For Black and Hispanic students that are negated during this grade shift they fall through the cracks of the educational pipeline only to leave a few years later. Alspaugh (1998) study of Missouri youth transitions between middle and high school examined how attendance to a new school and socioeconomic status influences graduation rates. Using Hierarchical Linear

Modeling, the study concluded that the ratio in the number of student transitions impacts whether youth remain in school. Specifically transitional periods between elementary, middle, and high school encourage lower academic achievement rates of students as they are continuously re-establishing their identity within divergent contextualized spaces (Alspaugh, 1998). For Black and Hispanic urban students contemplating leaving school, this state is critical to how they perceive themselves academically, socially, and emotionally in the classroom. This process of disengagement can be amplified in the movement from middle to high school as it is "an important milestone in that student's educational career, it can also be a time masked with feelings of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection" (McCallumore, 2010, p. 459). How urban youth navigate school transitions is a pivotal point in whether they stay or leave.

Racial Disproportionality in Graduation Rates

For Black and Hispanic urban youth who are negatively accentuated by educators the role of race plays an imperative in how they experience education and in the type of barriers that they encounter in the classroom. The hyperawareness of students of color is connected to the increased vigilance of these youth to underperform and it is anticipated rather than considered an atypical expectation. How youth are treated in educational settings including degree of inclusiveness by school staff, language depiction of their academic performance, and racial micro-aggressions creates a cyclical pattern of degradation and avoidance. The ecology of urban schools has sustained a de-racialized image of Black and Hispanic children in the classroom except for when their underperformance is highlighted as a determinant to education and seen as unsolvable. In efforts to demystify student variables that contribute to

graduation rates, researchers have largely perceived race and ethnic classifications as primary factors that make youth at-risk.

Factors highlighted by Abbot et al. (2000) as increasing the probability of leaving urban high schools focus on "general deviance, deviant affiliation, structural strains, gender-male, ethnicity- African American, low socioeconomic status, poor family socialization, low parental educational expectations, and low school bonding" (Campbell, 2003, p.18). Furthermore, these aspects underscore students of color in low-income communities as those that need to prove themselves to teachers as belonging in its structured middle class expectations.

In examining race and the experiences of students that leave school, researchers have analyzed stereotype threat and racial micro-aggressions in shaping student academic performance and engagement. Steele's (1990) focus on stereotype threat and racial vulnerability of students of color assist in explaining the influence of race, how students are educated, and whose right to an education it is for youth to acquire. Steele contends "lifetime exposure to society's negative images of their ability, these students ware likely to internalize an inferiority anxiety a state that can be aroused by a variety of race-related cues in the environment" (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p.797). This toxic internalization of oppression for students of color specifically for Black and Hispanic urban youth leaving high school makes education an intangible good. Moreover, racial micro-aggressions used by educators, administrators, staff, and research literature to characterize Black and Hispanic youth additionally serve to strip students of their educational legitimacy. This includes low expectations for what students can do, making prescriptives for who they will become, and efforts to corral children out of school. Racial micro-aggressions are used to enforce in

schools the message they are “insignificant or irrelevant” (Yosso et al., 2009, p.661). This irrelevancy and active policing of urban students frames their educational destiny by researchers and educators as simply worthless. Despite this shared ideal of the underperformance of urban students of color, growing percentages of youth are returning to school for a diploma. However, without research examining their narratives and experiences in coming back to school their academic pursuits are simply forgotten again.

Returning to High School

Exclusive focus on the indifference of urban youth that leave school has left the question of factors influencing their return unanswered. The depiction of students of color in urban contexts as dropouts paints a permanent picture of their educational experiences that leaves no room for re-assessment. In the 1980’s-1990’s minimal research was conducted on factors contributing to returning students’ decision to re-enroll. Borus & Carpenter (1983) conducted a study of returning students aged 14-22 years old and the influence of gender, socioeconomic status, race, and school characteristics in the decision to re-enroll. Using a probit model and student interviews results indicated that older students had lower probabilities of re-enrolling as being a year older influenced this outcome by 2% (Borus & Carpenter, 1983). Comparatively, lack of intent to enroll in college after receiving a diploma was found to be significantly negatively related to returning. The study further indicated “factors affecting the return to school were many that did not influence the decision; the return to school decision is in many respects a random individual event” (Borus & Carpenter, 1983, p.505-506). However, the conclusions of this study and the randomness of returning as an individually manifested outcome may not capture the intricacies of how students contemplate and navigate their realities within shared social institutions.

Kolstad & Owings' (1986) analysis uses a socio-psychological approach that examines individual aspirations and expectations for returning for a diploma. This quantitative study used data from the High School and Beyond to examine gender, race, employment, and socioeconomic status. The study concluded (1) Hispanic and Black young male dropouts re-enrolled at approximately 10% more than females, (2) Hispanic and Black students in upper three quartiles were more probable to complete high school than white dropouts, and (3) dropout/return rates for urban and rural, and suburban communities were 35%, 37%, and 42% respectively (Kolstad & Owings, 1986). Despite indicating that Black and Hispanic students have higher rates of re-enrollment, primary use of quantitative data only provides a partial understanding. Although "dropping out is a reversible decision" (Kolstad & Owings, 1986, p.22), without consideration of student narratives when they return research negates the decision to return from students themselves. Furthermore, it is unknown how students navigated their schooling contexts.

Metzer's (1997) study of rural high school returners, leavers, and G.E.D. enrollers used qualitative interviews from students and teachers to assess re-enrollment behavior. The study asserts that majority of students not returning cited concerns for support at school to maintain their enrollment status. A difference between school leavers and returners was that re-enrolled youth "reached through their experience, a turning point that helped them make the decision to return, while non-returners still explored the meaning of being on the outside" (Metzer, 1997, p. 18). How students construct the meaning of being on the outside is critical to their substantiality once they return and whether they initially re-enroll. Another finding was that students who completed a higher percentage of courses preferred G.E.D. programs rather than attend high school. Consequently, counselor interviews revealed that they

perceived returning to school as individualistic and were based on student motivation instead of school supports. A counselor in the study contended:

> "It's not impossible for the student who has dropped out from high school and has been on the outside one month, two months, maybe a semester, to return successfully. But in the realm of probabilities, I don't see it happening very often" (Metzer, 1997, p.18).

The hopelessness and uncertainty about the length of time a student is on the outside has an immediate implication for school staff that will encounter them on the first few days of their return. Yet, the characterization of a high school leaver as being on the outside demonstrates the lack of connectedness of youth when they are no longer a student. Understanding the complexities of returning to school after leaving requires an integrated support system that research has not comprehensively examined.

Metzer's study further highlights how the perception of the availability of educational services of youth can create role strain on staff. A principal interviewed during the study contended:

> "Returning students will be accepted, {but we} don't feel we need to alter graduation requirements. {But} returners can't return to the same system because he/she will fail again" (Metzer, 1997, p.22).

The concept of failure after returning and the fear of what it means to be good student is a constant theme. Still, the coupling of failure in school and being on the outside stigmatizes more than student's identities. It can create a barrier in the schooling process where students are given only one shot to be successful. A few small scale studies conducted on returning youth has focused on student characteristics of gender and race as primary indicators of re-enrollment. Chuang (1997) conducted a logistical regression model retesting data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth by Kolstad and Kaufman (1989) which showed 50% of dropouts during 1979-1986 returned to school. In the study, female students were more

likely to return to school after leaving and were influenced by socio-cultural and political changes in the decade.

Wayman's (2001) meta-analysis of returning youth who earn a high school diploma or G.E.D. shows that test scores and aspirations to perform well academically had positive effects on re- enrollment. Additionally, Mexican American students were found to be half as likely as non- Latino White groups to re-enroll although ethnicity was not significant (Wayman, 2002). Flores-Gonzalez (2001) conducted a study of inner-city Latino students and how they develop school and street kid identities in their effort to graduate. Majority of students were classified as low-income, limited English proficiency, with moderate rates of mobility. Consequently, the qualitative study focused on high school dropouts instead of returners labeling students as in-betweens. This in-between status characterized returners as they exhibited behavioral norms relative to students that were permanent dropouts and students that remained in school (Flores-Gonzales, 2001, p. 141). In comparison to students identified as school kids, returners expressed various individual circumstances that influenced their decision to return.

Moreover, these students were labeled as in-between because they "did not excel socially or academically and are not problematic; they become invisible to the teachers and staff, and go unnoticed both before dropping out and after returning" (Flores-Gonzales, 2001, p.141). Understanding this invisibility within the spaces of school is critical to unraveling the experiences of students of color. Particularly, as it relates to the role of individual perception of one's self within school. In an assessment of re-enrollment patterns of youth in California disaggregated by race, the study indicated that African American students posed higher re-enrollment rates at 43.3% compared to other students (Berliner, Barrat, Fong, & Shirk, 2008).

Students described various reasons for returning to school including maturity, personal growth, and change in home life. However, this study failed to analyze how students navigated school, home, and peer life making the act rather than the process of returning the exclusive focus.

Consequently, federal and state programs to address dropping out have been conflated with returning students lessening the impact of student re-enrollment. Taking this approach, allows no one to own the problem of students leaving school. Therefore, no one owns the need for dropouts to return. Still, if leaving school is examined why is not dropping back in? There remains a gap in data available to examine re-enrollers. With limited research on returning students and the challenges that schools face, longitudinal data is minimized (Berliner, Barrat, Fong, & Shirk, 2008). This study takes a closer examination at the re-enrollment behavior of Black and Hispanic youth residing in urban districts. This study explores characteristics of returning youth through multi-level modeling and case study analysis. I provide insight to the experiences and contextual arrangements of students' lives when they left school and how they returned. Additionally how policy can serve as an instrument or barrier for helping youth get back into school.

Given limited literature on returning urban students, this study examines individual, school, and neighborhood factors that shape how they viewed school prior to leaving and after returning. Metzer (1997) and Flores-Gonzalez (2001) assessment of re-enrolled youth operating on the outside and having an in-between status considers the isolation, disconnection, and obscured identities that returning students have prescribed to them by educators and schools. Still, current studies have not explored how returning urban youth impart adaptation strategies while transitioning between various cultural norms and

behavioral expectations of their neighborhood and school. In particular, the type of actions solicited and performed by urban youth as they sustain themselves within multiple domains. Additionally, how school policy may delegitimize cultural norms and behavioral expectations that urban students embody that may be viewed as counterproductive during their transition.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this section, I give an overview of the research methodology for this study. First, I outline the methodological assumptions in mixed methods research and provide an analysis of the study's research design. Second, I provide a summary of how the study was conceptualized and implemented and an examination of the quantitative and qualitative methods that I use to structure mixed methods design. I then explain methodological assumptions of using mixed methods in educational research, and my rationale for integrating qualitative and quantitative data in the study. Furthermore, this chapter provides a detailed analysis of the research rationale including why I use Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling, multiple case study, research methods for gathering data, and the study's limitations.

Methodological Assumptions

In educational research mixed methods approaches seek to integrate quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore a phenomenon. Using both methods in data collection allows the researcher to examine an event from various vantage points. Tashakkori & Teddie (2003) assert that mixed methods "incorporate techniques from both quantitative and qualitative research traditions yet combine them in unique ways to answer research questions that could not be answered in any other way" (p.x). The combination of diverse approaches in answering research questions has implications for how research is conducted, reported, and the type of lenses that are used to analyze data. Taskakkori & Teddie (2003) contend the use of mixed methods approaches developed from triangulation of data in psychology with Campbell & Fiske (1959) and sociology through Denzin (1978).

The use of mixed methods to examine education in the 1970's was termed by Denzin and Lincoln as *blurred genres* and *crisis of representation* as quantitative and qualitative analysis entered *paradigm wars*[4]. For example, although the use of statistical analysis provides numerical understanding to a phenomenon the lived experiences of individuals are not fully explained by numbers alone. Comparatively, qualitative analysis seeks to capture narratives and *thick* description of events in social settings. In-depth analysis of individuals in settings is not apparent in quantitative research alone. Combing both approaches seeks to explore the conceptual underpinnings of each approach within a single study. Despite limited use of mixed methods by educational researchers, recent literature (Creswell 2007; Creswell, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Mertens, 2009) has explored such approaches in examining diversity and schooling environments. Such approach is critical for this study as its focus is on marginalized populations in various school and neighborhood settings.

I combine quantitative and qualitative methodology to provide a more holistic viewpoint of the educational environments, transitional patterns, and navigational strategies that returning Black and Hispanic youth engage or disengage while pursuing a high school diploma. Isolating a single method will capture a depicted reality of how youth in the study experience school. Therefore, this study uses both methodologies to provide a more nuanced examination how urban youth in Roswell return to school through multiple case study and Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling. The concept of *paradigm wars* is used by Tashakkori & Teddie (2003) in their analysis of Denzin and Lincoln's ideal of mixed methods.

[4] The concept of *paradigm wars* is used by Tashakkori & Teddie (2003) in their analysis of Denzin and Lincoln's ideal of mixed methods.

Research Design

This study uses mixed methods to examine how Black[5] and Hispanic[6] urban youth in a district named Roswell return to high school after their withdrawal, and how they persisted toward a diploma. A mixed methods approach is used to understand how student, school, and neighborhood characteristics that influenced student re-enrollment through qualitative and quantitative analysis. Mixed methods research "is one which the researcher tends to base knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds; employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand the research problem" (Creswell, 2007, p.21). How the researcher frames the questions for analysis shapes the how data is gathered and interpreted. This can take the form of sequential data collection where the researcher collects information in phases or concurrent data collection where information is collected simultaneously.

There are two ways for conducting mixed methods: simultaneously or concurrent and sequentially or in phases. Data that is collected concurrently occurs when the researcher gathers data all at once. In comparison, the sequential approach collects data in different stages. This study uses sequential data collection in comparison to concurrent, because qualitative data was the primary method, and was used to inform the quantitative variables that were chosen for this study. Additionally, I used sequential data collection, because I had extended access to conduct interviews with students, and collect quantitative data for

[5] The term *Black* as used this study refers to how the student racially identifies as recorded in the school district's database.

[6] The term *Hispanic* is a racial category in which students select their racial and/or ethnic preferred identification. This information is obtained during the district enrollment process and is recorded in the school district's records.

approximately a year. I did not have immediate time constraints on my data collection. This allowed me to collect my research in two separate stages rather than simultaneously.

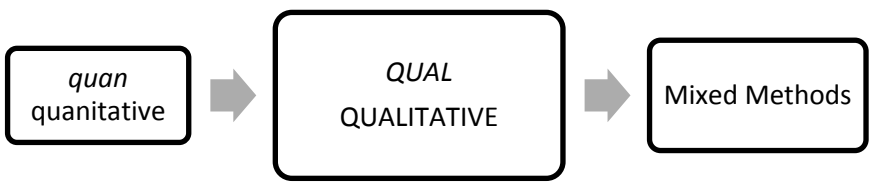
The term Black as used in this study refers to how the student racially identifies as recorded in the school district's database. This information is obtained during the district enrollment process and is recorded in the school district's records. First, I collected the quantitative data from the district's database to explore factors at the student, school, and neighborhood level that influenced leaving school and characteristics of those that returned in the district. After gathering the quantitative data, I then collected qualitative data from selected students that came back to school. DeCuir-Gunby (2008) contends that with sequential data collection there are four approaches in conducting mixed methods:

> (1) *QUAN* → *qual* (emphasis on quantitative aspect, with qualitative leading qualitative)
>
> (2) *QUAL* → *quan* (emphasis on qualitative aspect, with qualitative leading quantitative)
>
> (3) *QUAN* → *QUAL* (equal emphasis on both method with quantitative leading to qualitative)
>
> (4) *QUAL* → *QUAN* (equal emphasis on both methods, with qualitative leading to qualitative) (p. 129).

Although these are the standard methods, researchers can integrate any of the above data collection procedures (Decuir-Gunby, 2008) based on the questions that they seek to answer and their line of inquiry. More emphasis can be placed on qualitative and quantitative methods. Despite the study using a sequential explanatory design where the quantitative precedes the qualitative data, I placed more emphasis on the qualitative aspects of the study,

specifically due to the study's objective, framework for the qualitative and quantitative phases, and the type of research questions that I wanted to answer (Ivankova et al., 2006). This study examines factors associated with early school withdrawal, the process of returning, and adaptation strategies that urban youth used during their transition. I use a *quan + QUAL* format as presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Mixed Methods Study Format



Using a *quan + QUAL design* allowed the *quan* data that I gathered from the district to inform the type of *QUAL* data that I obtained more in-depth information. Data collected from the Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Model was used to shape the interview questions that I asked the students that re-enrolled back into school. The study occurred in two phases and uses a modified version of Ivankova et al. (2006) visual representation for conducting sequential explanatory mixed methods designs in Figure 4.

In Phase I, I use Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling to analyze several factors: (1) individual characteristics of returning Black and Hispanic urban youth, (2) school factors, and (3) neighborhood in predicting district re-enrollment. Data was collected from Roswell Public Schools of student that had left school prior to graduation, and that had attempted to return back to school during the 2012-2013 academic year. Roswell's students attend school in a non-clustered design. For example, students that reside in the same neighborhood may not attend the same school. Likewise, students that attend the same school

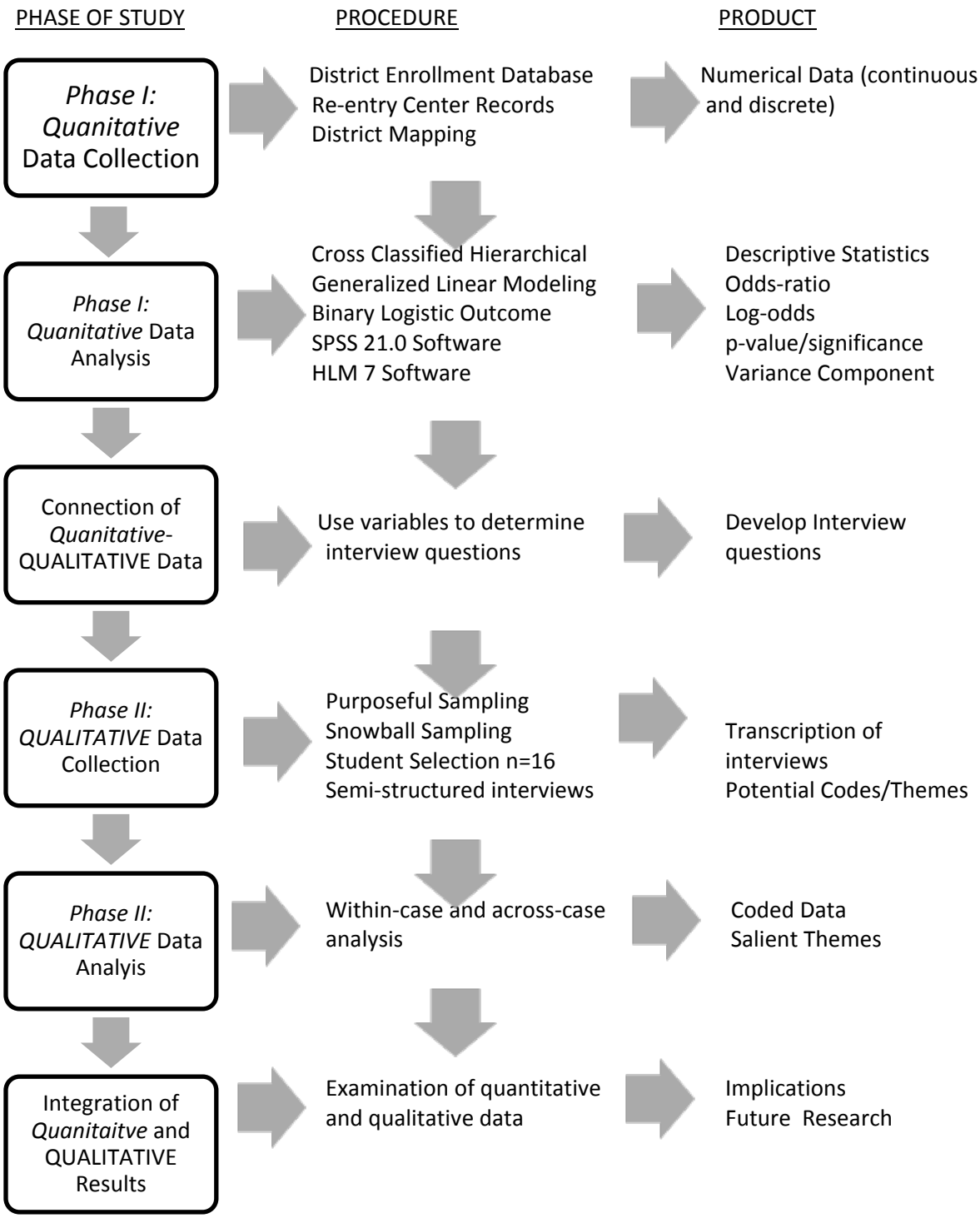
may not live in the same community. Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling is used to account for the non-linear and non-nested nature of such models. I use a three level modeling to capture the multiple contexts and distinctive environments that students navigated in Roswell as they returned to high school.

In Phase II, I conduct a multiple case study of sixteen Black and Hispanic urban youth who left high school prior to graduating, and describe how they transitioned and navigated their way back to public education. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews from students that returned during the 2012-2013 academic year. A case study is used because it is an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p.18). I use a multiple case study format to capture how different students that participated in a dropout recovery program transitioned back into high school. Roswell Public Schools' dropout recovery program is designed to provide supportive services and resources to youth to encourage them to re-enroll and persist toward graduation.

In accordance with case study research, data is collected in the context that the event takes place--a center in Roswell that assists students that have left school in returning for a traditional diploma. I examined students that participated in this unique district-wide dropout recovery program to highlight how their diploma narratives are contextualized by their in-school and out-of-school experiences.

A detailed description of Phase I: Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling and Phase II: Case Study Analysis is provided followed by the rationale for each method and steps for gathering data. Additionally, a description of the concepts and variables used for each phase is discussed.

Figure 4: Mixed Methods Phases of Study



Phase I: Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling

Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling is used to answer the following research question:

1. *What student, school, and neighborhood characteristics define the re-enrollment behavior of Black and Hispanic urban youth?*

I use Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling to determine what student, school, and neighborhood characteristics determined whether a student came back to school. This research question identifies the attributes of returners and assisted in forming the type of interview questions that I asked in Phase II to youth that re-enrolled back into school. I provide a rationale for using Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling in comparison to other methods in the proceeding sections. Additionally, I define the variables used in the model, methods for gathering data, and internal and external validity.

Rationale for Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling

The use of Hierarchical Linear Modeling in educational research has been called "random coefficient models, multilevel linear models, covariance components models, and unbalanced models with random effects" (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002, p.462). Despite various ways that it has been labeled, Hierarchical Linear Modeling tests "first-level units nested within second-level units, and second-level units nested within third-level units" (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002, p. 462). Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling allows the researcher to examine the nested nature of a particular outcome at several levels of analysis. Traditional statistical methods to test the influence of a given outcome have used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) or Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) which are single-level models (Lee,

2000). However, depending on the unit of analysis these approaches will not be able to account for variation in a given outcome between students, across schools and neighborhoods which is the intent of this study. When measuring school effects using Hierarchical Linear Modeling Lee (2000) asserts: “Neither approach is appropriate {OLS or ANOVA}; both the student and the school must be considered as important units of analysis. HLM allows researchers to consider more than one unit of analysis, using multilevel data” (Lee, 2000, p.127). The use of multilevel modeling in educational research allows the researcher to view the student, school, and neighborhood as multiple overlapping units. This approach seeks to depict the influence of various environments operating as domains that provide deeper level of analysis that may not be captured with single level modeling alone.

I use Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling to analyze the re-enrollment behavior of Black and Hispanic urban youth in Roswell to determine the individual, school, and neighborhood characteristics of students that left school and who returned. I use Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling in comparison to Hierarchical Linear Modeling to account for the non-hierarchical nature of schools and neighborhoods in the Roswell Public School district. Due to school attendance boundaries in Roswell, students are assigned to certain schools in elementary and middle grades if they reside in a particular neighborhood zone.

Students that live in the same neighborhood will mostly likely attend the same school and vise versa. However, at the high school level school assignment neighborhood zones do not apply. Students are able to apply to high schools in Roswell and are assigned without initial consideration to the neighborhood zone that they live. This study uses a Cross-Classified model, because not all students living in a neighborhood attend the same school

and not all schools have students from the same community (Meyers & Beretvas, 2006). Additionally, this study uses a Hierarchical Generalized Linear Model, in opposed to a Hierarchical Linear Model because the outcome variable, whether a student left school and returned, is a binary. When a Hierarchical Linear Model has a binary outcome coded as 0 or 1, a generalized model is the appropriate method for analysis. The level-one model tests student characteristics across individuals in the sample. For example, level-one characteristics in the model included: race, grade, and gender. Frank et al. (1998) argues that students "experience multilevels of the school as an institution, and a unique set of individuals experiences" (p.172). Examining the uniqueness of an individual's experience is a significant component of this study. The level-two model tests school level predicators across schools. Examples of school level variables include: school type and school graduation rate. Additionally, at the second level is the neighborhood variable. This includes the influence of living in a particular neighborhood zone on returning back to high school. This study considers that "social contexts are complex because they are defined at multiple levels and through relations among a variety of people in a common setting" (Frank et al., 1998, p.171). Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling attempts to account for potential differences between each student at a given school in the sample, across different schools, and neighborhoods. Multilevel modeling, specifically Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling, is an appropriate statistical approach for defining characteristics of students that returned back to high school.

Definition of Variables

At the student level, the variables "Black" and "Hispanic" are racial categories defined by the school district which parents select when enrolling their child in Roswell

Public Schools. For this study, students are classified based on their racial/ethnic identification to account for possible variation in the categorization of "Black" and "Hispanic" subpopulations. This includes identifying "Black" as inclusive of African, African American, and the Caribbean. The term "Hispanic" will be used to include ethnic populations of Mexican, Latino/a, Puerto Rican, and Dominican decent. In cases where two racial categories are listed one for each parent and/or guardian the racial category listed under the primary parent are used. Variables "gender" and "age" are defined by the gender category selected when enrolling in the district and years of age will be based on the start of the 2012 school year. Special Education identification is defined by whether there is a qualifying code listed in the student's records as SPED CODE or a student that is designated as receiving services at any point during their high school coursework.

At the second level, "school" will be defined as publicly funded high schools in the district according to Roswell Public Schools' district chart. I define the term "school" to be based on Roswell Public School's 2012-2013 school organizational chart and district mapping. Using this data, I identified middle, middle-high school combination schools, and high schools in the district. There are a total of 32 eligible schools that students can be placed when re-enrolling and includes traditional, alternative, turnaround, and educational options schools. The term "school" includes placement options at the specified locations.

At the third level, "neighborhood" is defined by Roswell Public Schools as a geographic area that students are placed in grades K-8. These zones are used for elementary and middle school assignment. These neighborhood zones from the 2012-2013 academic year are included in this study. Although the neighborhood zones do not apply to high school aged youth, I use the zoning map because it provides a standardized method for identifying various

communities within the district. For example, different neighborhoods are know in Roswell as the community of "Tyson's Crossing" and are distinguished by residents rather than having visible geographic boundaries. There are three zones in Roswell Public Schools which students attend a variety of school locations in the district. The zones are: North, East, and West[7]. Within the three zones are 15 neighborhoods with students being able to attend different schools from various neighborhoods.

Methods for Gathering Data

Data for this study was obtained from Roswell Public Schools' database and used to model student, school, and neighborhood characteristics at three level of analysis. I collected data from the district's *dropout* list, Re-entry Center's electronic files, and intake folders as students re-enrolled in school. A detailed description of variables is listed in Table 1[8].

Student Level Variables

Student data was collected using various sources that I accessed at the Roswell Public Schools Re-entry center. The district's data sources included: student grades, prior school history, and demographic information. At the Re-entry center I was able to gather information on when students left school, factors that influenced why they left school, demographic data including their age and grade when they returned, school attended, and the neighborhood zone that they resided. For this study, "student" level variables are defined by verifiable listings of the student names from the district's *dropout list* that left school without a diploma for the 2012- 2013 academic year. Each year, the Re-entry center receives a list of students that were classified as having left school without a diploma. The district refers to

[7] Zones are listed in the Appendix.
[8] Table 1 is in the Appendix.

students that left school as being on the *dropout list.* The student level variables that I used captured the general composition and characteristics of returners in Roswell. Student level variables were used to understand the identity of urban students in Roswell that are returning to school to have an adequate representation of *who* is re-enrolling. Given current research on higher rates of leaving high school without a diploma for students of color when compared to their white counterparts, this study focuses on the Black and Hispanic student population. Additionally, majority of the students in Roswell are youth of color with a large percentage of this specific racial group returning back to school. In terms of GENDER, AGE, and SPED CODE this study explored whether male or female returners, higher aged students, or those that are identified as having special education services were more likely to re-enroll.

School Level Variables

At the second level, this model assesses the role of school placement returning back to school in Roswell. In Roswell Public Schools, re-enrolled students can be placed in 32 traditional or alternative schools. The school list was obtained from Roswell Public Schools school organization chart for the 2012-2013 academic year. For returning students that are unable to secure placement immediately following their enrollment, they are placed at the Re-entry Center until space becomes available. In accordance with Roswell's School Assignment Policy, students can select their school of preference within their geographic region in the district. Returning students can provide recommendations for two high schools that they prefer to attend. This is listed in order of preference at the Re-entry Center, and data is stored in the center's electronic database. For students being placed at a traditional public school or alternative school, they are required to meet policy requirements including pre-tests prior to their placement. Additionally, students may be required to have a certain state exam

placement score prior to being enrolled at a particular school. However, these special entrance requirements are limited to five schools, and are considered by Re-entry staff during the placement process. Students are placed in schools where they are perceived to be the most successful academically.

Given that some traditional and alternative schools may be considered more selective by returning students than others, the Re-entry Center may encounter circumstances where schools have reached capacity. More selective schools that are often suggested by staff at the Re-entry Center to returning students are schools that: 1) serve ages 20 and over, 2) have programs geared toward returning students aged 19 and under, 3) have day and evening classes, 4) operate over the summer, and 5) offer childcare. For students that are not placed at a traditional or alternative school, they are re-enrolled at the Re-entry Center which serves as a transitional setting. The Re- entry center offers math and history courses during the academic year and credit recovery options. Math and History courses are instructed by a certified Roswell Public School teacher. They have been employed in the district for over ten years. The credit recovery program is also operated by a certified teacher during the school year, Re-entry center staff, and/or interns during the summer session.

Youth that attend the Re-entry center include: 1) students that have seven or less classes to take to graduate high school, 2) are repeating a course that they previously failed, 3) have a graduation date within a 4 month period of re-enrollment, and/or 4) are close to 21.5 years of age. Students who fail courses can receive an F or F+ as a final grade. Students that receive an F+ are eligible for retaking the course at the Re-entry Center as the student has failed the course but regularly attended. They may be able to re-take certain modules of the course that they previously failed without having to repeat the entire course. For students that

receive an F they are still considered to retake a course, but may not be able to start the online class at different stages than other students. Students over 21.5years old with more than four courses to take prior to their birthday are often transferred to another program. Students are unable to remain in Roswell Public Schools past 22 years of age. Regardless of whether students attend traditional, alternative, or the transitional center they receive a high school diploma from where they last attended school or where they re-enrolled. Diplomas are issued from Roswell Public Schools. Students are not able to receive a diploma from the Re-entry center.

Neighborhood Level Variables

The Roswell Public School District's School Assignment Policy divides the district into several regions or what is referred to as neighborhood zones. The district uses a geographic map that encompasses various neighborhoods and cities that are within the Roswell Public School System. At the third level of the Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Model the neighborhood zone is defined as a geographic area as identified by Roswell Public Schools. These zones are used for school assignment in the district. The three zones are: North, East, and West. The North zone has 17 high schools with East and West having 8 and 6 respectfully.

Outcome Variable

A binary outcome can be a classified as a "yes" or "no". For example, Rumberger (1995) conducted two-level model of students leaving without a diploma and the influence of school factors. The outcome variable was modeled after logistic regression and examined the log-odds of leaving school (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). I will use a binary outcome to

determine the influence of student, school, and neighborhood characteristics on returning to school with an outcome of 1=returning (yes) and 0=non-returning youth (no).

Statistical Model

Quantitative data was obtained from the Roswell Public Schools database and Re-entry Center records of students for two groups during the 2012-2013 academic year: (1) students that left school or been classified on the *dropout list,* and (2) students that had attempted to return back to school by going to the Re-entry center. To re-enroll back into school, all students are required to go to the Re-entry center. First, I gathered student names, gender, race, special education identification, last school attended, zip code that they reside, and other demographic information from the district's annual *dropout list* that indicates students that are no longer enrolled in Roswell Public Schools. Second, I obtained the Re-entry center's list of youth that had completed the intake form at the center. The intake form is completed by all students that are interested in returning back to school when they arrive at the center. The intake form includes: questions about why they left school, their name, address, age, grade, and other demographic data. Third, I integrated the district's data on students that left school with the Re-entry center's information on youth that attempted to return. The integration of this data produced a total sample size of 2211 students that had left school prior to graduation and/or returned back during the 2012-2013 academic year. Students that are listed on the district's list were classified as not having been in school and were dropped from the academic roles.

Students that did not meet a particular criterion for this study were removed from the dataset. This included students that had (1) missing data which could not be obtained from

district records, (2) students aged out of the district reaching 22years old, (3) incarcerated youth, and (4) not identified as Black or Hispanic in accordance to district records. Students were removed from the dataset that had missing data as I wanted to have complete information on students that were classified as leaving school and on those that returned. Additionally, students that were approaching 22 years old, the age maximum for attending high school, were taken out of the total sample size. These students were not included because they would have aged out of the district by the time that they would have been able to graduation high school. Incarcerated youth were not included in the sample, because they were not enrolled by extenuating circumstances rather than by their individual choice not to attend school on a daily basis. Lastly, youth that were not identified as being Black or Hispanic were removed, because the other racial categories would fall outside the parameters of this study. After integrating the data, I was left with a sample size that included approximately 350 students that did not racially identify as “Black” or “Hispanic”. These students were racially classified as “White”, “Asian”, “Multiracial”, or “Other” in the district’s database. These students were removed from the total sample size of youth that I used in this study. This criterion is used to garner adequate representation of Black and Hispanic urban youth that are re-enrolling in the district while eliminating individual cases that may provide bias results in the model.

The total sample size was 1861 students for the model. The Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Model at each level:

Level 1 Model:

$$\text{Log} = \left[\frac{n_{ijk}}{1-n_{ijk}}\right]$$

$$n_{ijk} = \beta_o + \beta_1 * GRADE_{ijk} + \beta_2 * AGE_{ijk} + \beta_3 * FEMALE_{ijk} + \beta_4 * BLACK_{ijk} + \beta_5 * SPED_{ijk} + b_{00j} + c_{ook}$$

Level 2 Model:

$$b_{ooj} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} * TRADITIO_j + \cup_{oj}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{02} * SCHOOLGR_j$$

Level 3 Model:

$$c_{00k} = \gamma_{00} + \mu_1 * EAST_k + \mu_2 WEST_k + v_k$$

At level 1 the outcome variable is notated as n_{ijk} and represents 1=student returned to school and 0=non-returner where *i* is at the student, *j* at the school, and *k* neighborhood level. β_o is the intercept. Level one variables are modeled as $\beta_{1\ldots x}$ and represents the relationship between each variable and the outcome variables. For example, the variable *GRADE* is notated where $\beta_1 * GRADE_{ijk}$. $\beta_1$is the relationship between the variable *GRADE* and whether a student returned to school. At level two, β_o is the outcome variable with intercept γ_{00}. $\gamma_{01}$is the relationship between the variable *TRADITIO* on whether a student returned to school. The neighborhood level looks at how neighborhood zone influences coming back to school. γ_{00} is the outcome variable for level three. Neighborhood zone is modeled as dummy variables. The full model is depicted below.

Full Model:

$$n_{ijk} = \beta_o + \gamma_{01} * TRADITIO_{jk} + \gamma_{02} * SCHOOLGR_{jk} + \mu_{03} * EAST_{jk} + \mu_{03} * WEST_{jk} + \beta_1 * GRADE_{ijk} + \beta_2 * AGE_{ijk} + \beta_3 * FEMALE_{ijk} + \beta_4 * BLACK_{ijk} + \beta_5 * SPED_{ijk} + b_{00j} + c_{ook}$$

For this study, I test the full model presented above to determine the characteristics of students that returned to school in Roswell. I use the results to frame the qualitative section of this study presented in Phase II.

Interpretation Techniques

The use of Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling provides analysis for whether school type, neighborhood, or student characteristics predicted re-enrollment behavior. District level and Re-entry center data were input in SPSS 21.0 Software to obtain descriptive statistics of the student population. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the number of students, minimum and maximum values, and means of each student, school, and neighborhood level variables. Data was then input into HLM 7 Software for further analysis. I used HLM 7 Software to calculate coefficients for each three level predicator and variance components. Depending on these outputs I determined whether school type influences re-enrollment behavior. The p-values used in the model will be set at .05. The model was centered around the grand mean to absorb variation at the second and third level of analysis if applicable. Group mean centering is not used, because level-one predicators are not able to vary at the second and third level which may influence how the three-level model outcomes are reported and interpreted. Additionally, I examined variance components in the model to test the degree of variation in re-enrollment behavior across schools and neighborhoods.

Phase II: Multiple Case Study

Phase II of this dissertation uses multiple case study to examine the narratives of urban students that re-enrolled in the district. This phase answers the following research questions:

2. *What adaptation strategies are used by returning Black and Hispanic urban youth to transition between cultural norms and behavioral expectations in their neighborhood and school?*
3. *How does school policy influence cultural norms and behavioral expectations of transitioning Black and Hispanic urban youth?*

I conduct multiple case studies of students that returned back to school to capture the multiple pathways that they encountered that led to their school withdrawal, and how they navigated in-school and out-of-school contexts. In this section, I describe the rationale for using multiple case study, methods for gathering data, and analytical methods for conducting this qualitative phase. Moreover, I discuss how students were selected to participate in the study.

Rationale for Case Study

Phase II uses multiple case study to provide a detailed encounter of the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic urban youth that return to school for a diploma. Case study analysis is used to explore these research questions to gain an "in-depth description of some social phenomenon" (Yin, 2009, p.4) specifically how re-enrolled Black and Hispanic urban youth transitioned back to school after their withdrawal. Case Study methodology is used to "systematically gather enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions" (Berg, 2004, p.251). This methodological approach allows the researcher to deepen understandings of a particular event in the space where it occurs while contextualizing the environments that cultivate an individual's reality. Case study is used as a research strategy when "how and *why* questions are being posed, when the investigator has little

control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 1989, p.1). The "case" that is examined is the person or group and its processes, understandings, and the world that shapes how one perceives of a particular set of events. For this study, the case is returning youth of color in the context of Roswell Public Schools.

Case study analysis is an approach used in qualitative research to "allow investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, and school performance" (Yin, 2009, p.4). Case studies allow the researcher to deepen the understanding of a particular event in the space that the event takes place while highlighting the particular conditions of the environment that cultivate that reality. A case study approach is described by Stake (1978) as a "bounded system" where

> "the boundaries are kept in focus. What is happening and deemed important within those boundaries (the emic) is considered vital and usually determines what the study is about" (p.7).

Case studies are used to capture the context of an individual's reality or group of persons operating in a given phenomenon. This allows the researcher the opportunity to *illuminate a decision or set of decisions* in a problem-posing manner. For example, the researcher asks the participant questions that seek to explore a particular phenomenon and to provide understanding to the individual's decision making process and their interpretation of an event. Researchers are able to "study an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system including a setting or context" (Creswell, 2009, p.73). This study of Black and Hispanic urban youth that return to high school will focus on the individual, and various in –school and out-of-school contexts that they navigated, and the role of policy in mediating the process of re-enrollment. In this study, the decision to return to school will be illuminated

by the researcher to understand factors that shaped their exit from high school. Additionally, how they culturally and behaviorally navigated divergent norms and expectations within different domains.

Examining the individual within their everyday lives "allows the investigators to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, and school performance" (Yin, 2009, p.4). This is not exclusive to the perceptions and values of their everyday lives but additionally in how they interact, attachment strategies, and engagement with an institution within that world. Qualitative case study is a methodological tool that seeks to capture how one operates within a system defined by the researcher while exploring the realities of that context. The decision to return to school is influenced by how Black and Hispanic urban youth perceive of their experience, adaptation, and navigational tools they use to stay in or ultimately leave the educational system.

Methods for Gathering Data

Various documents from a wide variety of sources are used to create a "chain of evidence" (Yin, 2009), and to richly underscore student narratives in returning back to high school. Documents used for this study include: district data, Re-entry center electronic records, district mapping, and interviews. Interviews are "one of the most important sources of case study information" (Yin, 2009, p. 106) as it provides real life context from the individuals that are experiencing a phenomenon in contemporary ways. Students were selected for interview based on the following criteria: 1) racial identification as Black or Hispanic, 2) listed in the Re-entry center's database of youth that attempted to re-enroll in school, 3) aged 16-21.5 years old, and 4) that are currently enrolled in a diploma program at

the Re-entry Center, a traditional, or alternative high school. This criterion is used to capture key characteristics of students that are returning back to school in Roswell. Youth aged over 21.5 years old and are turning 22 years old prior to their graduation were not selected for interview as they would not be eligible to receive a diploma from Roswell Public Schools due to aging out of the district. Additionally, students that returned to school and are currently enrolled in a diploma program were selected for an interview, because they are able to describe how they transitioned back to school and are currently navigating that process.

Sixteen students were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. Students were purposefully selected from two groups: (1) Black and (2) Hispanic racial identification. I use purposeful and snowball sampling to select students for semi-structured interviews with the assistance of the Re-entry center staff. Purposeful snowball sampling allows the researcher to gain access to potential study participants based on the existing knowledge of individuals who interact with students in a particular context. This type of sampling is useful in qualitative research as it assists to locate individuals who are aware of participants that can offer detailed and informative information to the study (Patton, 2002). Phase II of this study examines student narratives on returning to highlight the value, motives, and reasons associated with their school withdrawal and subsequent re-enrollment. Students were purposefully selected based on the study's established criteria and student characteristics. Also, I used snowball sampling to select students based on the recommendations of Re-entry center staff who were assigned to work with students during their process of getting back into school. I met with Re-entry center staff, specifically Recovery Specialists who recommended students that would have an interest and the opportunity to participate in in-person interviews.

After completion of the student interviews, data was then transcribed and coded for

further analysis. Given that "every researcher devises his or her own scheme for handling qualitative data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 187), this study uses pattern matching and rival explanations as to analyze the interview data. Pattern matching is an adequate analytical technique because it "compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one" (Yin, 2009, p. 136) aiding in the way that the researcher can present their findings. The Phase II findings of the study are then "matched" to existing theoretical propositions to determine whether current literature substantiates my research findings. Additionally, I use rival explanations as an analytical technique to examine whether there is literature that speaks to other considerations on the re-entry experiences of urban youth of color.

Data obtained is transcribed, coded, and placed in a "case study database". A case study database is used to organize transcribed data for further analysis. This coding strategy consists of categorizing the data by theme and putting them into properties. The process of categorizing data for researchers can linger on as "data often seem to beg for continued analysis past the formation of categories" (Merriam, 1998, p. 189). However, I reached a saturation of data analysis where similar themes continued to emerge. This allowed me to move to the next stage of placing them into properties prior to the final synthesis. Properties are used to reduce qualitative data. Additionally, the study uses cross-case analysis. A researcher uses within-case analysis where "data are gathered so the researcher can learn as much about the contextual variables as possible that might have a bearing on the case" (Merriam, 1998, p.194) then leading to the cross-case analysis. Using pattern matching with rival explanations to triangulate existing research, and by conducting within-case and cross-case analysis allowed the study to highlight pertinent themes that students expressed during their interview. Also, mixed method is a measure for triangulation (Taskakkori & Teddie,

2003). Sources of triangulation and crystallization include relevant literature, multi-level modeling, and qualitative data analysis. I will use transcribed data and compare results with established theoretical frameworks and with the quantitative data that I obtained.

Internal and External Validity

Data obtained from the Re-entry center are used to provide context to student narratives while reducing bias within the estimates. A key consideration is the role of internal validity or "experimental procedures, treatments, or experiences of the participants that threaten the researcher's ability to draw correct inferences from the data about the population" (Creswell, 2009, p. 230) in assessing returning students. Several methods are used to address internal validity in the study including consideration of omitted variables and selection bias. Given that the structure of this statistical analysis and using an HLM framework is unable to account for all variables that can impact re-enrollment, this study seeks to use variables that are correlated to the outcome that is most impactful to whether students return. These variables are identified based on missing data for student responses to survey questions.

Another issue with validity is selection bias of participants. Selection bias results when the process for choosing study participants influences the interpretation of dependent variables in the model. Various measures are used to reduce selection bias by including data from students that went to the Re-entry center that returned to school, never enrolled, or that left school during the academic year. Providing participants an equal opportunity to be examined in the district dataset will assist in reducing the over or underrepresentation of students with certain characteristics that influences their re-enrollment behavior. In reference to external validity, this study is not seeking to determine "casual relationship over variations

in persons, settings, treatment, and outcomes" (Shaddish et al., 2002, p. 22). Generalizability is not a key objective of the study. Rather, analyzing student, school, and neighborhood factors of Black and Hispanic youth on re-enrolling can provide insight to programs that can serve these students in this particular context. The results of this study will add to the current body of literature on students returning back to high school for a diploma.

Researcher's Knowledge Claims

This study explored how students of color in Roswell experienced coming back to school. Given my previous experience working with students in G.E.D. programs, youth returning for a diploma, and as a former high school teacher how I will implemented my intended mixed methods approach was shaped by my epistemological understandings of mixed methods, and how I have come to see public education. Creswell (2007) contends that "setting a knowledge claim means that researchers start a project with certain assumptions about how they will learn and what they will learn during their inquiry" (p. 6). These knowledge claims apply to methodological approaches used by researchers and theoretical approaches that describe data and its interpretation process. Embedded in researchers' conception of knowledge is "what is knowledge: ontology, how we know it: epistemology, what values go into it: axiology, how we write about it: rhetoric, and the processes for studying it: methodology" (Creswell, 2007, p.6). How researchers incorporate mixed methods is indicative to how they define, describe, and report what is deemed knowledge. How an individual experiences school is mediated by various factors including their values and beliefs which may or may not be incongruent with divergent social settings. This analysis incorporates a mixed method approach to underscore how individual, school, and

neighborhood factors shape returning back to school, and to allow students to tell their stories rather than giving them *voice.*

Self Disclosure and Researcher Reciprocity

Entering into this study I became aware of issues of reciprocity in how a study is conducted, communicated, and interpreted as self-disclosure "can be defined as communication that relates to one's self" (Harper & Harper, 2006, p.251). It is the relationship that the researcher forms with the participant and the discourse that takes place pre and post the interview process. How the researcher interacts with the participant can influence how they are perceived by the researcher and how the researcher perceives the participant. The issue of reciprocity is imperative while conducting educational research as "a person's disclosure increases the likelihood that the other party will also disclose" (Harper & Harper, 2006, p.251). This study ensured confidentiality and privacy of students interviewed as they will be sharing their experiences while being within the regulations of the district's educational system.

Researcher's Role

My interest in examining re-enrollment of urban youth originated during my internship at the Re-entry Center during Summer 2011. As an intern with the district and a private research company that works with the center, I was able to have informal access to the center's database and allowed to conduct interviews with students that aligned with their research objectives. Collected data was shared with staff at the Re-entry Center and the private research company. Having informal access to the center's database and conducting interviews with returning students has allowed me to gauge the core mission of the center as well as develop relationships with staff, the principal, counselors, students, and Headmasters

with schools that youth are placed. Interacting with students has provided me with access and the opportunity to build active relationships. This is critical in interviewing youth that are the most marginalized and excluded allowing for more in-depth interviews. My former teaching experience and interest in equity and urban students additionally plays a role in how I conceptualize high school leavers and educational policy. My research role is connected to my current understanding of the depiction of Black and Hispanic youth in K-16 institutions. As an African American woman with extended family members that have dropped out of school I am not only engaged in telling the stories of students, but additionally in uncovering the narratives of marginalized youth in urban contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH SITE BACKGROUND

Introduction

My interest in examining factors that influence why urban youth leave school prior to graduating developed from my experience working with students that became disconnected from high school. In many ways, high school was no longer about obtaining an education that would be used for upward social mobility or for defining ones pathway through life, but the diploma was desecrated as a piece of paper that possessed limited value, decreased intrinsic meaning, and was a byproduct of *doing* school. This ideal of "doing school" as a way for many of the urban youth that I encountered to perform the student-role while simultaneously escaping from it. School became a building that served little purpose for one's future. It was a place that they were required to be. As I continued to research why students leave classrooms around the country, I began to question if their educational journey continued in out-of-school contexts. Did their educational journey end or continue after leaving school? Did they give high school another chance? These questions framed my interest in examining a large urban city that had implemented a dropout recovery program to increase graduation rates. In particular, in a school district that overwhelmingly educated students of color while facing increasing dropout rates making the district an epidemic in waiting.

What proceeds is a description Roswell Public Schools. In this section I provide information on the district's student demographics, initiatives to increase the graduation rate, and the Re-entry Center. Additionally, I discuss the background experiences of students that participated in this study.

To Live in Roswell

Roswell is a large urban city in Massachusetts and has approximately 636,000

residents. The city is surrounded by historical monuments, four year universities, two year colleges, and is home to several professional sports teams. The largest industry employers in are in healthcare, finance, higher education, and insurance agencies within the public and private sector. The racial composition of Roswell is 47% white, 24% Black, 17.5% Hispanic, 8.9% Asian, and 3.9% Multiracial with 36% of residents speaking a language other than English at home. The implementation of the district's Racial Balance Plan in the 1960's to desegregate its public schools resulted in white flight to surrounding suburban communities. State efforts to achieve racial balance in Roswell through a busing program of white and non-white children resulted in racial riots and political charged confrontations between schools and district residents. With the increase of white families exiting the city, over the last few decades, Roswell has had a rapid growth of Black, Hispanic, and immigrant groups living in racial and socioeconomic silos further segregating its neighborhoods and schools.

Roswell Public Schools is located in the Roswell and serves approximately 57,000 students in 127 schools. Although Roswell is classified as a majority white city, its public schools are overwhelmingly Black and Hispanic. Over 77,000 school aged children reside in Roswell with approximately 20,000 students not attending its public schools as a large percentage attend parochial and private institutions. For the 2012-2013 academic year Roswell's student body was 40% Hispanic, 36% Black, 13% white, 9% Asian, and 2% Multiracial. Non- white students account for 87% of the student population in its pre-K through 12th grades. In terms of socioeconomic status, an overwhelming percentage of Roswell's students are classified as living in low-income households. At school this accounts to 69.4% of children eligible for free school breakfast and lunch with 5.5% able

to receive reduced meal costs. Additionally, 53% of Roswell's students are eligible to receive food stamps. Coupled with its diverse yet homogenous racial and socioeconomic demographics, Roswell Public Schools has a large population of English Language Learners. English Language Learners (ELL) include 27,000 students whose primary language is not English at home, with over 17,000 classified as Limited English Proficiency, and approximately 10,500 children born in the United States. Youth enter into Roswell's classrooms speaking over 85 languages and bring with them diverse backgrounds and out-of-school experiences which shape the types of classrooms and neighborhoods that they encounter on a daily basis. Roswell's cultural and linguistic diversity highlights its racially yet homogeneous groups in terms of social class making it a unique site location for this study.

Research Site Context

After researching Roswell's dropout rates over the last decade, I began to look more closely at the district wide programs that served to assist urban youth in returning back to high school. Specifically, I was interested in urban youth that had dropped out due to being disconnected, pushed out, truant, or suspended and/or expelled. With the 1983 cohort the dropout rate for the district students was 39.6%. However during the 2006-2007 academic year, the four year cohort rate for the graduating class was 57.9% with a five year graduation rate of 65.4% for all students. For Black and Hispanic students in this graduating cohort the graduation rate was 54.2% and 51% respectively when racially disaggregated. To systematically address fluctuations in the number of students leaving school each year prior to graduating, Roswell Public Schools in collaboration with the Major implemented a "Graduation for All" initiative in 2007. The main objective for the

"Graduation for All" program is to:

> "ensure that *every* student graduates from high school with the skills and knowledge to succeed in college or other post-secondary education. The initiative includes an unprecedented collection and analysis of student dropout and graduation data in order to devise a citywide plan to ensure a 100% graduation rate" (Roswell Public Schools, 2013).

The district developed a multi-prong method that incorporated: 1) student data collection, 2)city- wide community based forums, 3) credit recovery program during the summer and academic year, and 4) open dialogues with various school personnel including teachers, counselor, and principals. The collection of student data using interviews, test scores, and early identification techniques was unprecedented due to the limited strategic focus on dropout recovery in prior years. Community based forums were used to gather information and collaborate with educational advocates and churches to address the silent yet visible dropout epidemic emerging in Roswell. In addition, to foster student academic development and to increase graduation rates, Roswell started ten credit recovery programs that students could enroll during the academic year and summer sessions. Credit recovery allowed students to repeat courses that they had previously failed through an online based program at certain sites that were easily acceptable to students by train or city bus. Coupled with these strategies, Roswell Public Schools involved school personnel in reducing the dropout rate by having open dialogues with staff. This included placing additional counselors and life coaches in various schools around the district to offer emotional and psychological support to students that were contemplating leaving school.

A partnership in 2007 between the Mayor, Roswell Public Schools, and the Superintendent created a streamlined approach to increasing graduation rates. During the district's new focus on dropout recovery two former Roswell high school students that

had previously dropped out were independently working at the ground level helping students that had left school to return. After connecting with youth by word of mouth on various neighborhood corners and through community based networks that serve at-risk children, the former students presented a proposal to the district that outlined their efforts for reconnecting youth that were disconnected from the Roswell Public School System. In 2007 their proposal for a one-stop center for students who dropped out of school was presented to the district. This grassroots effort involved counselors from several schools, and they provided student data including transcripts to the former high students. This collaboration resulted in development of the Re-Entry Center to assist students that had dropped out yet had the desire to return back to school. In 2009, Superintendent Dr. Jones stated:

> "Like every city in the country, Roswell faces the very serious challenge of eliminating the dropout problem. We are taking a very systematic approach to keep our students in school and to bring back those who have dropped out. The Re-Entry Center provides a safe haven, where students can get the individualized support they need to ensure that they get back on track to receive a high school diploma" (Roswell Public Schools, 2013).

In years prior, Roswell Public Schools had seen minimal growth in its graduation rates as approximately 60% of its students were not graduating from high school. Majority of these students are Black and Hispanic. Any evident gains in students of color graduating were not being reduced by early dropout prevention and identification programs. There was growing legitimacy for an innovative space where students could seek educational options even after they were no longer enrolled in high school. This "safe haven" would provide students with the necessary information and knowledge of how to navigate returning to high school while providing supportive services that fostered their continued academic development. The Re-entry Center was developed to serve this purpose and to advocate for students that are often the most socially marginalized and educationally discarded by

schools.

"We Care Too Much To Let You Go"

In 2009, the Re-entry Center opened its doors to students and welcomed returning youth back to school. Operating as a public-private partnership between Roswell Public Schools and the Roswell Industry Council, the Re-entry Center provides students an entry-way back intoschool by connecting them with the resources and opportunities needed for them to reconnect back to their education. As an extension of the Roswell Industry Council's "Project Reconnect" the Re-entry Center provides services to students in the district that are considered at-risk, have high rates of absenteeism or truancy, been suspended or expelled, or involved in the juvenile justice system. The motto of the Re-entry Center- "We Care Too Much To Let You Go" is displayed amongst pictures of successful high school graduates that came to the center to re- enroll back into school. The Re-entry Center is connected to a vocational and math and science high school, and is surrounded by one of the city's bus station, trains, and majority Black community. Walking inside the center students enter through concrete blocked walls that are covered with murals, paintings, and quotes by President Barack Obama, Mary McLeod Bethune, and the previous mayor of Roswell. President Obama's comments on dropping out are portrayed on one of the Re-Entry Center walls noting:

> "Dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself. It's quitting on your county- and this country needs and values the lives of every American".

For students returning to school at in Roswell, the motto "We Care Too Much To Let You Go" is embedded in the notion that dropping out is not a last stop for many of its students. Instead, their educational journey continues. In this way, the district cares too much to let

students leave school-to let them go permanently. To enter the center students use a buzzer because the entryway doors are kept locked during the day. At the center, security is a concern as it is located in Turner Square and has open access to the public, and is on a major street located near the train and bus station and a local community college. Additionally, the center is located near a police station and there are constant sirens and fire truck sounds echoing by during the day. As students enter the Re-entry Center, they are greeted by several computers and classrooms that have internet access for completing school work and related assignments. There are approximately twenty computers that students have access to after logging into a attendance log that keeps track of their assignments, hours, and work completed each day.

The Re-entry Center employs four dropout recovery specialists through the Roswell Industry Council and a teacher and Headmaster by the Roswell Public School System. Each year, the Re-entry Center receives a district-wide dropout list from Roswell Public Schools that lists youth that have left school without a diploma and have not graduated. The dropout list includes students in middle and high school. The dropout list contains students' telephone numbers, parent and/or guardian contact information, addresses, and other pertinent information that is used to contact youth and their parents. Several strategies are used by the Re-entry Center to contact youth from the dropout list including: 1) contacting students, parents and/or guardians by telephone, 2) mailing letters to the residence on address to encourage youth to re-enroll, and 3) CollectEdu calls. CollectEdu calls are automated calls from the Re-entry Center to the student's residence that uses voice recordings of youth that have left school but have successfully re- enrolled. The Re-entry Center is not a school but a program that mediates the re-enrollment process for students

and their parents. The four dropout recovery specialists' objective is to provide advocacy and structured support for students and their parents including bilingual services. During the 2010-2011 academic year, the district had approximately 1,900 listed dropouts with 1,600 students age 16 or older. Of youth that left school in the district that year, over 700 came to the Re-entry Center with approximately 550 students placed at school or comparable educational services. The center has placed students in traditional and alternative schools with 65% of re-enrolled dropouts currently attending. Using a multi-prong approach by contacting students via telephone, mail, and CollectEdu calls, the four dropout recovery specialists are able to develop positive relationships with students that return to school as their mission is to ultimately provide students with information that fosters self-advocacy, independence, and support their transition to adulthood.

Process for Re-enrollment

When youth enter the Re-entry Center to re-enroll in school, they are required to submit various documents to the district and often to their placement school. These documents include: immunization records, proof of residency, and legal forms of identification. For students aged 18 years or younger they are required to have parental signatures to return to school and a driver's license or comparable form of identification. Students are paired with a Dropout Recovery Specialist who guides them through the process of re-enrollment. As students come to the center there are several steps that they must complete to be assigned a Dropout Recovery Specialist and to re-enroll back into school. The first step is for students to watch a ten minutes video that reinforces the ideal that dropping out is often a decision that students have to make in their lives. The video created by former students that dropped out and returned to school examines the challenges

of not having a high school diploma and reasons that promoted their re-enrollment. Its purpose is to create a sense of connectedness with students that they are not alone in leaving school, and supported when they return back. Second, students are assigned a Dropout Recovery Specialist that discusses social and personal costs of dropping out. Students are provided information on annual salary and wages lost when not having a high school diploma.

Additionally, the recovery specialists discuss the cost of living independently in Roswell and the type of job descriptions that support the type of lifestyle that they are envisioning for their future. The Re-Entry staff believes that students are able to make positive decisions about their lives when they are provided with the proper resources and information required to make informed decisions. Many of the students the Dropout Recovery Specialists work with lack the necessary knowledge of the costs of an apartment, food, child care, and/or transportation as they often reside with parents and/or guardians that are responsible for such information or friends and relatives with whom they only share costs. Therefore, teaching students how to be independent rather than dependent is a critical component of what the center incorporates in its dropout recovery efforts. Moreover, youth complete a re-enrollment form that has their student identification number, date of birth, academic credits earned, prior school attended, and factors influencing why they left school.

As students complete the re-enrollment form they are asked how emotional, academic, and non-school factors influenced their decision to leave school. Social/Emotional factors include student connectivity to school, truancy, and lack of support systems. Academic factors gauge how youth perceive assignments, perceptions of

being academically behind, and passing classroom and state testing requirements to graduate. Personal factors assess whether students left school due to employment, were incarcerated, being a parent, or family related issues. Additionally, students are able to select a school that they would prefer to attend in the district when they are officially re-enrolled. After students have completed the center's steps to re-enroll, they then have to submit the proper paperwork that Roswell Public Schools requires to return to high school. Trained school counselors are onsite at the Re-Entry Center to evaluate student transcripts including course credits and prior enrollment grades. Trained school counselors are staff that have previously worked at the high school level as counselors in the district and are currently certified. For some students that are not placed at a traditional or alternative high school in Roswell, they are able to complete credit recovery classes at the Re-Entry Center. Credit recovery courses allow students to repeat classes that they have previously failed and received an F or an F+. The credit recovery courses can be completed within several weeks to the length of a normal semester. Students are able to work at their own pace and can complete work at any location by logging into their individualized account. This allows students to work on assignments before school and after school hours. After these steps have been completed and information released to the school identified for placement, the student is able to enroll or start credit recovery courses at the Re-entry Center. They are then considered a student of Roswell Public Schools.

Fragmentations of My Life: Student Introductions

Society has long ordained the receipt of a high school diploma as a standard for progressing through the fundamentals of life, a basic academic achievement prior to

adulthood, and a social marker of credentialism. A public school education has been viewed as the great equalizer and a method of social mobility (Storer et al., 2011). Still, as millions of youth leave high school each year questions still remain for whether such an equalizer is equitably distributed, and if so why students are not embracing measures that are implemented for the betterment of their lives. A high school diploma has been deemed "a mechanism of sorting and contributes to a wide array of economic and political divisions within the current social structure" (Campbell, 2004, p.17). This mechanism for sorting youth has also contributed to socially justifiable methods for denying equitable learning spaces through the use of federal policies leading to decreased graduation rates (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009). Across the country early identification dropout initiatives have focused on repairing kids, counseling students into G.E.D. programs, minimizing perceived negative school based associations, and subtle yet direct forms of pushing them out of school. Given that "dropping out is not an event, it is a life course process" (Verdugo, 2011, p. 187) for many students that leave high school their story should not end there. What proceeds are introductions to the students that I interviewed for this mixed methods study. Their background will provide insight to the type of home and school environments that they came from, and their experiences as youth of color and as students.

Merissa

Merissa has alabaster skin with straight brown mid-length hair that flows around her shoulders and shadows her thick black lumpy sweatshirt hovering over her gray baggy sweatpants. She is outwardly cheerful often greeting staff at the Re-entry Center with a welcoming smile yet has a quiet demeanor. Merissa is a 19 year old Latina who was raised in a single parent home by her mother and has never lived outside of Roswell. After sixth

grade, Merissa enrolled in a math and science college preparatory exam school that admits students in 7th, 9th, and 10th grade. Merissa entered the college preparatory school in 7th grade with student selection is based on prior gpa and test scores. Being bilingual in English and Spanish, she says "I'm a fast pace learner." Merissa scored proficient on state high school math, science, and reading examinations and has taken AP Biology and AP Spanish. After her mother Marisol's health declined entering into her junior year, Merissa became disconnected from school due to increasing responsibilities at home. Subsequently, she was transferred during the end of her junior year by Roswell Public Schools to a high school that serves youth who are predominantly identified for special education. Outside of school Merissa has various responsibilities that impact the amount of time that she has to contribute to her education. Merissa is primarily responsible for the taking care of the household and is the only child as she does not know her father. Although she lives in the inner city Merissa describes her community a being a "nice and safe neighborhood" where her elementary school is across the street from her house. Merissa believes her mother shielded her from gang violence and drug activity that were prominent within a few blocks of her residence. Merissa left high school in 12th grade.

Devon

Devon is an African American male and has a light brown complexion that disappears into his thick black eyebrows and close cut fade haircut. At the time of the interview, he was wearing a gray University of Georgia football sweatshirt with fitted blue jeans that hover over his 5'8 foot statue. Devon exhibits a "cool" demeanor greeting his peers with "dap" and short head nods. As an avid sports fan, he played football and basketball as a child. "Growing up it was...kinda regular...I just did things that regular kids

do...watch tv, play sports." Devon was raised by his biological mother and father in a quiet neighborhood with limited criminal activity. Although he had friends at his high school, majority of his friends reside in his neighborhood and are not currently attending school. Devon currently resides with his parents. "I work hard but I can be lazy sometimes too. I just like to lay back and just chill..well...relax. Yeah! I'm more like a laid back kinda person." Devon has transferred to various high schools in Roswell over the course of the last several years beginning in 2006. Since 9th grade Devon has attended four high schools including a traditional school, college preparatory science, arts, and technology high school followed by an alternative high school that offered day and evening classes. I first met Devon and his father when they came to the Re-entry Center to re-enroll. I was briefly introduced to them by one of the Dropout Recovery Specialists whom informed Devon and his father about my study. Devon is 20 years old and left high school in 12th grade. He had been classified as a senior for the last three years.

JoQuan

JoQuan is a 5'7 African American male with a caramel complexion that was darkened by his black trench coat and dark black jeans. He exhibited a quite personality that was complimented by his round glasses which slightly hovered over his nose. JoQuan's family structure includes his mother and three older brothers as he is the youngest.

> "Well, I guess it's alright...that but then again it has its ups and downs..you know? I guess there's some good things and then there's some bad...you don't want to be the youngest you know? You wanna be done with everything already."

JoQuan has lived in Roswell his entire life but constantly moved to different

neighborhoods and schools since kindergarten. His favorite music artists are KRS One and Tupac whom he describes expresses music in a way that people can understand. “Music that people can relate to...any music that’s real...you know...and not just about some random stuff that doesn't relate to you at all.” He says that enjoys listening to “old school” music and hanging out with friends. When I first meet JoQuan, he was nervous about the interview. He was most concerned about me asking questions that he could not answer. Once I explained the purpose of the study, he wanted to ensure his confidentiality. After obtaining assurance, he immediately opened up and explained various factors that caused him to leave school and ultimately return. At the time of the interview, JoQuan had not passed state reading and mathematics examinations and has obtained credits to be classified at a 9th grader. JoQuan is 20 years old. Throughout high school JoQuan has felt disconnected from his education but he believes “I’ve had alot of good and bad school experiences.” He has left school twice prior. When I interviewed JoQuan this was his third time attempting to return back to high school.

Theresa

With her smooth black hair in a low puff, Theresa enters the center with colorful high top sneakers, with fitted jeans and a stylish shirt with jacket. Her favorite music is Reggie and she “likes to dance, listen to music, and go shopping.” When Theresa comes to the center, she goes directly to a computer and begins logging into her assignments while saying brief hellos to the staff and other students. She is very focused on completing her credit recovery courses so that she can re-enroll in an alternative high school. Theresa generally comes to the center when it opens to the late afternoon to complete assignments as she believes that there are too many distractions at home. Theresa identifies racially and ethnically as Caribbean and moved to the United States at the age of five. Her parents speak

Creole and she has adopted some of the language but primarily speaks English. Theresa's parents also have linguistically transitioned from Creole. "When they came here they spoke Creole but yeah they speak English now." She is the oldest of three and has one brother and sister who attend Roswell Public Schools. Compared to her siblings, Theresa says that she underperforms academically. "They go to a charter school in West Park it's called Academy of Roswell, they are honor roll students…like compared to me. My grades are not…compared to them are very low." Although she considers herself to not have as high grades as her siblings, her favorite subjects are English and History. "Those are easy subjects for me. Math is a little bit more harder." She started to disengage from high school during her sophomore year to hang out with her peers. After being out of school for several months she returned back to get on track with her education. Theresa left high school in 11th grade and is 16 years old.

Kara

"*I'm* Puerto Rican", Kari says with two brothers and one's adopted. Kara was born in Roswell and is 5'4 with long black straight hair that flows to her mid back. In her baggy sweatshirt and pants with white sneakers she is one of the more quieter students that comes into the center as she mainly speaks to her assigned Dropout Recovery Specialist. Her favorite type of music is "Spanish music". Kara currently lives with her boyfriend and her mother as she has had an estranged relationship with her mom since she was a child. Due to not having positive relationships and interactions with her mother, Kara was put into the care of the Department of Child and Family (DCF) Services and was living in foster care when she was a sophomore in high school. Kara was identified by Roswell Public Schools as needing special education services. She was placed at a school that predominantly serves students with special needs.

Since she was not excited about her placement at her new school Kara was involved in several fights at school with female and male peers. This resulted in her being suspended numerous times. Kara believes that her grandmother's death played a major toll on her behavior and on her re-focus on graduating. In addition, her parents' limited educational attainment influenced how she began to value a diploma as she would be the first in her family to graduate high school. "My mom never graduated...she never made it to 12th grade...umm..my dad neither...always was in jail." The memories of her grandmother coupled with her mother's relationship made school more difficult for her to bare. Kara is currently a senior in high school and wants to obtain a college degree in criminal justice.

Bacari

Bacari is an African American male and considers himself to be "outgoing, funny, and loud". He is 17 years old and has three other siblings including a younger sister and two older brothers. His father moved to the United States from Jamaica and his mother is from North Carolina who he believes influenced his upbringing by raising him differently than other kids. Bacari does not have an active relationship with his father and was primarily raised by his mother in Roswell and grandmother in North Carolina. His mother graduated from high school and attended two years of college. His younger sister lives in the United States and his brothers currently reside in Jamaica. Outside of school Bacari's main focus in making money. As an avid saver, Bacari wants to be an stockbroker or accountant when he gets older as he enjoys making money. To encourage him to achieve academically in school, his mother applied to a mentoring program with one of the Roswell professional athletic teams. The program serves at-risk urban youth in the district that have potential to attend college but are living in low-

income communities. After being accepted to the program in middle school Bacari was assigned a mentor and attends professional athletic games to expose him to various educationally based opportunities. When he graduates from high school, he will receive a scholarship to attend a local university through the program. However, entering into his sophomore year, Bacari started to dislike school as he did not have a sense of belongingness with his peers. After permanently leaving school, Bacari entered into Job Corps to obtain a high school diploma but ended up getting kicked out due to disciplinary issues as he believed he was being forced by his mother to attend. "I told her {mother} that I wasn't gonna go to Job Core cause it was in Maine, and she didn't believe me so I just got myself kicked out when I went up there." When he left Job Core, Bacari returned back to Roswell to pursue a high school diploma. He is currently taking credit recovery classes at the Re-Entry Center.

Rasheed

With his 5'8 foot cocoa brown statue and three inch dreaded hair, Rasheed is outgoing and often highly opinionated on issues in the community. During our interview he suggested "I'm too real to be telling people about myself." Prior to high school he played sports soon became interested in art.

> "Like growing up...I played football, I played pop warner and then I got to high school and played football my freshman year...stopped, came to Jefferson stopped playing sports all together pretty much. I became more of an artist and then after my senior year, that's when I started playing basketball again."

Rasheed is passionate about art and enjoys drawing and painting murals and doing computer design. He considers himself to be a confident person who is often misunderstood to be conceded. "The way I come off to people, people assume that I'm

cocky and I feel like I'm a lot better than everybody else..which may in a sense be right, but at the same time its kinda like...the reason why I really never had friends". By not having as many friends in comparison to his other peers, he primarily talks and engages with the Re-Entry staff. He enjoys conversing with staff to on adult issues and to seek advice on courses and life situations. As one of seven children Rasheed considers himself as the middle child that has to protect his younger sister from going on the wrong path in school.

> "Cause like growing up...especially cause I'm in the middle I have two younger ones and I have three older ones, it puts me in like a really like awkward predicament and most...in most cases cause it's like, you know in most cases their making like...like my older sisters made so many mistakes like growing up like my younger sisters...like my younger sister, she's the one that I pay...pay the most attention to, so its kinda like you become a lot more overprotective of the young...younger siblings than you do the older ones."

Rasheed's efforts to be more overprotective of his siblings are due in part to having a positive relationship with his father. Several of his siblings have attended four year universities. His older brother attended Harvard University, and his other brother and one of his sisters enrolled in a four year university. Prior to going to the center, he attended a vocational high school which is in a adjoined building next door. Rasheed has had troublesome relationships with teachers in high school and subsequently felt forced to leave as he suggests he was pushed-out. After leaving school he went to the Re-Entry Center to re-enroll the following week with his father.

Jacob

Jacob is the youngest of six children and he has three sisters and brothers. He has dark chocolate skin that was shielded by his close fade hair cut, black hoodie, and baggy jeans. When I met Jacob he was enrolled in credit recovery courses at the Re-Entry Center through a partnership with Roswell Court. Roswell Public Schools the court system created

a transitional program for youth in juvenile justice institutions or that were on probation as young adults to return back to high school to obtain a diploma. Jacob described that his life "it's complicated...its real unexplainable" as he left home at a young age. Since the age of 12 Jacob lived on and off the streets of Roswell after his father kicked him out the house. He believes that when his parents moved from the Islands to the United States when he was a child that his family had financial hardships that they had not experienced prior. "My family's from the Islands and they have a lot of land in the Islands and stuff, but here they don't have nothing ya know? They broke here; cause like my family don't really have nothing here in America." Although he lived in a low-income neighborhood in Roswell with his father Jacob always has had a strained relationship with his father. Growing up Jacob felt that as the youngest he was overlooked as others assumed that he knew what to do even as a child. After he left his father's house at 12 years old he lived with his mother and then uncle. Due to continued problems with living with relatives, Jacob then become homeless while attending high school. He would sleep outside and finally in a car. Being homeless prompted him to get involved in criminal activity which resulted in him going to jail and being on probation. Jacob is currently going to court for making threats against his father. He equates being homeless while in high school from his childhood experiences given that he was the youngest. When I interviewed him he was 21 years old.

Darri

With her soft voice and quiet demeanor, Darri is five feet tall and has mahogany colored skin that blends into her short crimped hair cut. She is African American with a short stature that is complemented by her shy personality and medium petite build. As a child, Darri wanted to be a veterinarian as he loved working with animals. Darri has

attended the center since middle school and has worked with Re-Entry staff to support her in obtaining a high school diploma. She was born and raised in Roswell and resides with her mother and she takes pride in her family. “I have three older brothers one is deceased but I have two younger ones and their awesome boys.” Her strong relationship with her mother and in particular her brother due in part to her family relationships and deaths that she has encountered. One of Darri’s brothers died while she was in middle school at their house resulting in additional stress as his death was “very traumatic”. Coupled with the tragedy of coping with her brother’s death Darri became pregnant in middle school in 6th grade. She was 13 years old. Darri initially contemplating leaving middle school at 13 due to being pregnant, but was able to garner some support from a few teachers to continue her education. However, as she progressed through her pregnancy, she began to feel isolated by peers who questioned her actions and lacked school supportive services. Due to the lack of peer support and resources to assist teen mothers in getting a diploma Darri left school. When she left school she did not return for two years. Although her father was not actively involved in her life, she equates his absence to fueling her motivation but negatively effecting her desire to graduate high school. “I feel like it was a little bit harder; not having my dad around, maybe it would have influenced me to be more...but yeah...be more”. Darri says that her favorite subject in school is English and she enjoys writing long stories in her free time. She returned to school after having her first child, but has left and came back on various occasions. Darri is now attending the Re-Entry center completing online credit recovery classes. She is currently in eleventh grade.

Taya

Chalk sized dark brown dreads fall to her round face and cuff her shoulders and

medium sized build. Taya is an 5'8 African American female that is 20 years old and prides herself in her dreaded locks and boyish clothing style and demeanor. When I met Taya she openly identified herself as being gay and having discovered this when she was younger. Since she has identified herself as gay she has encountered various offensive responses and what she believes to be improper treatment because of her sexual orientation. Taya said that she was jumped in high school during her junior year for being gay. She believes that she has had a challenging life as a child that was never easy. "To me, I don't know...my life was hard...I had a tough life basically. I felt that...and...if somebody was to write a book about me today...that book would be long...{laughs}...you can say that." Taya is the youngest and has an older brother that is 24 and a sister that is ten years older. Her father died when she was 8 years old and she has had a difficult relationship with her mother who she often blames for her leaving school and her father's death. Growing up in a single parent household with her mother. Taya's older brother was locked up in prison while her sister lived outside of the home and had several children. At sixteen she left her mother's house due to constant arguments and disagreements resulting in her living with her Aunt in Roswell. In school her favorite subject was History. "It was not math definitely {laughs}I would say it's like probably history or something...that's the easiest for me". Although Taya is taking online credit recovery classes at the Re-Entry center, she is uncertain of her goals after graduating and whether she will actually finish high school.

Carlos

Surrounded by thick black wavy hair that is constrained by a rubber band, Carlos' puffy ponytail falls below his shoulders and never goes unnoticed at the Re-Entry Center. With his stripped red, gray hoddie with matching sweatpants, and red fitted cap he has a lightly growing beard with black eyebrows and a tan completion. Carlos is 5'5 and has a

relaxed and “chill” demeanor. He racially identifies as Puerto Rican or “Spanish” as his parents are from Puerto Rico and he believes that he lives in a low-income neighborhood. “Yeah, I’m from Roswell and I’m from...I live in a really Spanish...Black neighborhood so I feel at home...but then I feel like it’s still like very low class.” Carlos has several siblings but is his parents’ only child together and was born and raised in Roswell. “I have three brothers and one sister and I have like one adopted brother..my mom adopted him from Haiti...not like he lives with me but she donates to him and I like...when I go over there he comes over to my house and you know we connect.” In middle school Carlos participated in baseball and football but decided not to continue as he entered into his sophomore year. As a child Carlos always loved going to school and his parents expressed to him the importance of getting a diploma. However, after changing schools in 4th grade he became disconnected as the transition caused problems. Since 4th grade Carlos has been truant and often hangs out with his peers instead of attending school. He has also experienced with drugs prior to entering middle school. Carlos came to the Re-Entry center to get back on track with his education during his sophomore year through online credit recovery classes. He began skipping school to use illegal substances and subsequently was arrested for selling drugs while being enrolled at the center. At the time of our interview, Carlos was released from jail the week prior for selling marijuana. He believes that his recent arrest is making him re-commit to getting a diploma and graduating from high school.

Luis

Luis is the oldest of four children and lives with his biological parents in Roswell.

He has a short 5'4 foot frame with thick black eyebrows and dark black low cut hair. In his free time he is always trying to figure out how to make money. "I'm like always just a little business person, like I always try to figure out a way to get money. Right now I have a job so after this I'm going to my job, but back then I used to like, I don't know. My father used to bring stuff from work and I used to be selling it." He has three younger brothers and grew up playing baseball which he considers to be his favorite sport. His childhood dream was to play on a professional baseball league in the Dominican Republic. Luis was born in the Dominican Republic and came to the United States when he was six years old. Although Luis comes from a close knit family that values an education he has had some academic struggles in school including completing homework assignments and being truant. His father graduated from high school in the Dominican Republic and currently works at a local university. Luis' mother did not graduate from high school. Prior to leaving high school, his favorite subjects were gym and math. "I'm a type of dude that thinks everything, like everything has to make sense to me, if not it would bother me until like, until I figure it out so math was my favorite subject because of that". He considers himself to be a relaxed and calm person that has encountered several struggles. "Basically I would say like I'm a very funny guy, I'm been pretty chill, but you know life doesn't give you what you want so you have to deal with it." During elementary school Luis became less interested in attending school due to the toll of completing homework assignments as he believed that school work should not come home. By 10th grade Luis left high school but would still attend on an irregular schedule. He has returned to high school to graduate and he wants to pursue an education in engineering.

Gabriella

When I interviewed Gabriella at the Re-Entry center, she had a very professional

and mature demeanor that was complemented by her bright yellow cardigan with white shirt and denim blue jeans. “I like to dress up. I like...I like, I love fashion. So I'm hoping that at some point, that in college I get to study fashion, to work in the fashion business or counseling because I also like giving people advice.” Gabriella is very into fashion as well as putting together stylish outfits that add flavor to her soft and quiet personality. Gabriella hardly comes to the center to complete work as she mainly does her credit recovery classes at home. “I'm shy...but it’s like (short laugh); I'm shy. So once you introduce yourself, or I introduce myself to you; you get to know me, I'm very outgoing”. As a shy student she often felt alienated at school because she did not have many female friends and other peers to associate. In 10th grade she became depressed and was admitted to a hospital for depression as she often contemplated suicide. She is Dominican. Gabriella’s mother graduated from high school and attended a trade school to become a medical assistant in which she currently is employed. Gabriella’s parents divorced when she was younger and she has lived with several relatives during middle and high school. Gabriella’s relationship with her mom caused her to often feel isolated from her peers influencing how she them felt about herself. Although her parents are divorced, she retains a positive relationship with her father and previously lived with her aunt. Confrontations with her mother coupled with pressure to achieve academically made her education less of a priority. When I interviewed Gabriella she was living at her aunt’s house and was hoping to repair her relationship with her mother. She hopes to attend college after graduating high school. She is currently recovering with the help of her therapist and the assistance of the staff at the Re-Entry center.

Lucas

Lucas is a Puerto Rican male that is approximately 6 feet tall and has thin linky arms with olive colored skin. His hair is slightly shaved and dark brown completing his slim

face. When entering the center, Lucas is often wearing a toboggan or fitted cap with baggy sweatpants and a plain colored t-shirt and sneakers. He also regularly enters the center wearing black sunglasses and diamond shaped studs in his ears. Lucas is relatively quiet at the center and comes when it opens and usually stays into the late afternoon. He gives brief headnods to the Re-Entry staff and proceeds directly to log-in to the computer and start his work. Outside of school Lucas enjoys spending time with his peers. *"I* love to go shopping, hear music, and be with my family, travel and work too". He has two sisters, one younger and another older with a newborn sibling. Most of the time Lucas generally enjoys being social with peers, and was into sports years prior. "I played basketball for my middle school and my high school". His favorite music is "rap…strings". After his parents separated when he was younger, he lived with his mother in Roswell. Lucas attributes leaving school due to his involvement with his peers. In spending time with his friends who were not in school, he began to lose focus on graduating. This impacted his desire to not only attend but to consider what type of employment that he would seek in the future. When I interviewed Lucas he was living with a roommate and working to help pay his bills. Lucas left high school in 12th grade. Before returning back he was out of school for approximately a year and had seven classes remaining to graduate. He hopes to finish his classes and graduate by June.

Josh

"Quite...calm...I just like to think". Josh is approximately 5'10 and has a towering build that complements his round face and light brown skin. Josh has dark black hair and greets the Re-Entry center staff with a soft pleasant smile. When I was introduced to Josh he was eager to share his opinion on leaving school and why he is not returning as wanted

to share his story with me. Josh's mother is from the Dominican Republic where she graduated high school and he racially identifies as Dominican. Living in Roswell his entire life, Josh is the youngest and has an older sister. As a child he often played sports with his older sister. "We played on a team, but I used to like play more basketball, baseball, when we were kids". He maintains a close relationship with his family. Entering into high school, Josh had difficulties with the transition from middle school as he did not have many peers to hang out with. "Yeah my relationship with the teachers were fine, yeah, I didn't really have a lot of friends in high school so I just kept to myself". As a more quieter student "keeping to myself" as Josh asserts resulting in him feeling isolated and beginning to dislike school. When Josh left school, he kept it a secret. After leaving school for the first six months Josh did not tell his mother, but instead would leave home to pretend to attend school and return home in the evening. Before returning to school he had not been enrolled for over two and a half years. During the interview he expressed concern for performing well academically since he had been out of school for a number of years making his transition back even more difficult. He believes that he has approximately 10 to 15 classes remaining in order to graduate and is currently completing credit recovery courses. Josh hopes to re-enroll in an alternative high school due to more flexibility. He is currently classified as a 9th grader and is 18 years old.

Mia

Big black baggy sweatpants with a white t-shirt and sneakers and long brown hair in a ponytail. Mia has an outgoing personality and is very talkative. Mia is the oldest of six siblings with two brothers and her father is not involved in her life. She currently lives

with her mother and is 20 years old. When I asked Mia to describe herself she described good and bad characteristics. “Kind, nice, respectful, sense of humor, good hearted, has a bad side... not really (short laugh)... I push myself to go forward sometimes. Maintaining a positive relationship with her mother and siblings, she has always valued getting a diploma. When she started 9th grade, Mia had a difficult time transitioning to a new school as she believed that she was too immature and easily impressionable. In 11th grade Mia had her first child which resulted in her leaving high school. She believes that her mother and teachers were supportive during her pregnancy but questioned the extent that her peers and the school could truly help her. For the last three years she has been classified as a senior due to her having another child in 12th grade. When I interviewed Mia she was currently pregnant and expecting a third baby prior to her planned graduation. Although she has struggled with completing the remainder of her classes in order to graduate, she hopes to get her diploma at the end of the school year. During the interview Mia expressed that she is working to support her children and was upset about the amount of minimal wage that she was receiving for working a labor intensive job in a kitchen. Receiving minimal wage coupled with being able to take care of her children independently of her mother is pushing her to graduate. For the last few years she has been on welfare and received government assistance to help support her children at her mother’s house. Mia is returning back to school to provide resources for her family and hopes to get off of welfare.

Conclusion

There are multiple factors that shape leaving school and various aspects that mold and cultivate why, how, if, and when urban youth of color disengage. Consequently,

locating students who leave school is a challenge as "once youth drop out of school, they leave the control of the school environment and they are often difficult to reach in the community" (Henry et al., 2011, p.157). This mixed methods study of urban students of color in Roswell who left school and returned provides insight to these lost narratives. What proceeds is 1) a quantitative analysis of Roswell Public School's students returners and non-returners, and 2) an in-depth multiple case study of sixteen Black and Hispanic urban youth who exited an educational system we call high school. For many of the students, a high school diploma became a prize to win and a journey to re-discover themselves as students in social spaces where they perceived they were not wanted. This included shedding a stigmatized dropout identity that had consumed the students for a period of a few months to several years. In many cases, they were not welcomed participants in-school and out-of-school contexts which served to further marginalize their experiences. Their voices provide candid access to why they left school, the challenges of returning, and their understanding of Roswell Public Schools' re-enrollment policy. Furthermore, how they skillfully crafted a place for themselves by navigating through their neighborhood and school environments in an effort to return and claim what they believed was rightfully theirs --a high school diploma.

CHAPTER FIVE: QUANITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I use Cross-Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling to examine student, school, and neighborhood characteristics of students who dropped out of high school during the 2012-2013 academic year and the probability of them returning back to school. Each year the district creates a "dropout list" that provides a listing of students who were classified as dropouts to the Re-entry Center. The Re-entry Center uses this data to contact students and their parents or guardians to encourage them to return back to high school. Students that returned came to the Re-entry Center to complete paperwork that documents their age, name, address, gender, race, and reasons for leaving school. Data was obtained from two places: 1) the district's database which included information on student's race, educational history, gender, age, and grade level, and 2) from the Re-entry Center's files as students re-enrolled back into school. Data from both sources including the district's dropout list and the Re-entry Center were merged together to form the dataset for this analysis.

Study Data

The original merged dataset included 2,211 students that had dropped out and/or returned back to high school during the 2012-2013 academic year. From the dataset 350 removed from the analysis. This left a total sample size of 1,861 students for the model. Of the 1,861 students approximately 37% or 687 students dropped out and returned at some point during the school year. The racial composition for the dataset is approximately 59.5% Black and 40.5% Hispanic. I used SPSS to organize the data obtained from Roswell Public Schools, and the Roswell Public Schools Re-entry Center. The outcome variable determined

whether a student dropped out of high school. As a binary outcome, students were categorized as dropout non-returner= 0 while dropout-returners were coded as 1. These are notated in the minimum and maximum values for the variable name *DROPOUTR* as presented in the descriptive statistics in Table 1. The variable *GRADE* ranged from 9th to 12th. The average student from the dataset was in approximately 10^{th} grade.

Table 1-Descriptive Statistics

LEVEL-1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

VARIABLE NAME	N	MEAN	SD	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
DROPOUTR	1861	0.37	0.48	0.00	1.00
GRADE	1861	10.35	1.19	9.00	12.00
AGE	1861	18.22	1.87	14.00	22.00
FEMALE	1861	0.47	0.50	0.00	1.00
BLACK	1861	0.59	0.49	0.00	1.00
SPED	1861	0.19	0.39	0.00	1.00

ROW LEVEL DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

VARIABLE NAME	N	MEAN	SD	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
TRADITIO	32	0.22	0.42	0.00	1.00
SCHOOLGR	32	60.54	22.92	13.00	98.70

COLUMN LEVEL DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

VARIABLE NAME	N	MEAN	SD	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
EAST	25	0.24	0.44	0.00	1.00
WEST	25	0.16	0.37	0.00	1.00

The row level descriptive statistics are the school level variables. Two school level variables are used including *TRADITIO* and *SCHOOLGR.* There are thirty two different schools that students attended. Schools were classified as *TRADITIO* =1 for traditional schools with

alternative schools equal to 0. The variable *SCHOOLGR* is noted as the school's graduation rate during the 2012-2013 academic year and ranged from 13% to approximately 98%.

The column level indicates which zip code a student resides. Two dummy variables were used with the neighborhood characteristics categorized by the student's zip code. There are twenty five zip codes in which students reside. Each zip code is divided into three neighborhood zones as determined by the district school assignment policy for elementary and middle school students. The zones are North, East, and West. The North zone was classified as having a zero value with two dummy variables EAST and WEST. Both dummy variables were classified as 1 = EAST or WEST, and 0 = not having the particular zone zip code. After running descriptive statistics, I used HLM 7 to do a Cross-Classified HGLM model using HCM2. The SPSS data was inputed into the HCM2 model using HLM 7. I used the Bernoulli function with a binary outcome or 0 or 1. An unconditional model was conducted to determine the probability of students dropping out with returners in the district. No variables were included in the model.

Unconditional Model

$$\eta_{ijk} = \beta_o + b_{00j} + c_{00k}$$

In the unconditional model η is the outcome variable *dropout-returner* for each *i* student in *j* school in *k* neighborhood. β*0* is the intercept with *b00j* and *c00k* as the school and neighborhood level error in the model. This is presented in Table 2. After running the unconditional model, the log-odds is -.60 with t-ratio of -4.68. The p-value is significant at .001. The odds ratio is .545 where the odds of a student dropping out of high school and not coming back are .545. The coefficient is negative and indicates that less than 45.5% of

students that dropped out came back to school where 1-.545= .455. The variance component across schools (row) is .33. This suggests that .33 of the variation in who drops out and returns to school can be attributed to variation across schools. The p-value is significant at 001. For the neighborhood level (column), the variation is .00019 which is extremely small. Living in a particular zip code in the district does not account for any variation between students that dropout and those that return back to high school.

Table 2: Unconditional Model Output

Final estimation of fixed effects: (Unit-specific model)

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	*t*-ratio	Approx. *d.f.*	*p*-value
For INTRCPT1, π_0					
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.606827	0.129673	-4.680	1804	<0.001

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval
For INTRCPT1, π_0			
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.606827	0.545078	(0.423,0.703)

Final estimation of row variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTROW,b_{00j}	0.57622	0.33203	31	181.09956	<0.001

Final estimation of column level variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTCOL,c_{00k}	0.01381	0.00019	24	25.17298	0.396

Next, I added student level predicators to the model to determine whether individual characteristics contributed to the log-odds of students dropping out of high school and re-enrolling. The variables race, age, and gender were added and were centered around their grand mean and were fixed at level 2. Grand mean centering was used to allow the student predicators to explain school variation in the model. The model is presented below.

Student Level Variables Model

$$\eta_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * AGE_{ijk} + \beta_2 * FEMALE_{ijk} + \beta_3 * BLACK_{ijk} + b_{00j} + c_{00k}$$

The variables AGE, FEMALE, and BLACK were added to the model for each student i in j school in k neighborhood. βx…x… represents the relationship between the log-odds of dropping out and returning to high school for each student level variable. This is presented in Table 3. For the variable AGE the log-odds .0019 was not significant with a p-value of .948. A student's age did not influence the odds of returning back to school. In terms of gender, the odds of returning were .38 greater for females than their male counterparts. The probability of returning back to school is higher for female than male students. This is significant at .001. For Black students, the log-odds is .24 and is significant at p-value= .026. Of Black students that dropped out they are .24 more likely to return. Black students have higher odds of returning to school than Hispanic students. Age was not a significant predictor in who returned back to school.

Table 3: Student Level Variables Output 1

Final estimation of fixed effects: (Unit-specific model)

Table 3 (cont'd)

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	*t*-ratio	Approx. *d.f.*	*p*-value
For INTRCPT1, π_0					
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.614732	0.129173	-4.759	1804	<0.001
For AGE, π_1					
INTERCEPT,θ_1	0.001933	0.029474	0.066	1804	0.948
For FEMALE, π_2					
INTERCEPT,θ_2	0.383093	0.103044	3.718	1804	<0.001
For BLACK, π_3					
INTERCEPT,θ_3	0.240165	0.107965	2.224	1804	0.026

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval
For INTRCPT1, π_0			
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.614732	0.540786	(0.420,0.697)
For AGE, π_1			
INTERCEPT,θ_1	0.001933	1.001934	(0.946,1.062)
For FEMALE, π_2			
INTERCEPT,θ_2	0.383093	1.466815	(1.198,1.795)
For BLACK, π_3			
INTERCEPT,θ_3	0.240165	1.271459	(1.029,1.571)

Final estimation of row variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTROW,b_{00j}	0.57172	0.32686	31	178.83802	<0.001

Final estimation of column level variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTCOL,c_{00k}	0.00840	0.00007	24	23.92074	>0.500

However, female and Black students have higher odds of coming back after leaving than their counterparts. Looking across schools, the variation is .32 and remained significant. At the neighborhood level, there is minimal variation across communities in who dropouts and then

re-enrolls in the district.

The remaining student level characteristics were added to the model and include *GRADE* and *SPED.* The model is presented below.

$$\eta_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * GRADE_{ijk} + \beta_2 * AGE_{ijk} + \beta_3 * FEMALE_{ijk} + \beta_4 * BLACK_{ijk} + \beta_5 * SPED_{ijk} + b_{00j} + c_{00k}$$

The variable GRADE log-odds is -.18 and is significant with a p-value of .001. Of those who dropped out, students in earlier grades were less likely to return with an odds ratio of .83. The probability of returning back to school is lower for students in earlier grades than in later grades. For students with SPED codes the p-values were not significant at .798. Having a SPED code did not influence the odds of returning back to school. The p-values of BLACK and FEMALE remained significant while AGE remained non-significant. Variation across schools accounted for approximately .31 of who drops out and returns as presented in Table4.

Table 4: Student Level Variables Output 2

Final estimation of fixed effects: (Unit-specific model)

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	*t*-ratio	Approx. *d.f.*	*p*-value
For INTRCPT1, π_0					
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.623379	0.127780	-4.879	1804	<0.001
For GRADE, π_1					
INTERCEPT,θ_1	-0.182399	0.051934	-3.512	1804	<0.001
For AGE, π_2					
INTERCEPT,θ_2	0.059914	0.034199	1.752	1804	0.080
For FEMALE, π_3					
INTERCEPT,θ_3	0.395498	0.103733	3.813	1804	<0.001
For BLACK, π_4					
INTERCEPT,θ_4	0.251116	0.108435	2.316	1804	0.021
For SPED, π_5					
INTERCEPT,θ_5	-0.034880	0.136412	-0.256	1804	0.798

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval
For INTRCPT1, π_0			

Table 4 (cont'd)

INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.623379	0.536130	(0.417,0.689)
For GRADE, π_1			
INTERCEPT,θ_1	-0.182399	0.833268	(0.753,0.923)
For AGE, π_2			
INTERCEPT,θ_2	0.059914	1.061745	(0.993,1.135)
For FEMALE, π_3			
INTERCEPT,θ_3	0.395498	1.485124	(1.212,1.820)
For BLACK, π_4			
INTERCEPT,θ_4	0.251116	1.285460	(1.039,1.590)
For SPED, π_5			
INTERCEPT,θ_5	-0.034880	0.965722	(0.739,1.262)

Final estimation of row variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTROW,b_{00j}	0.56242	0.31632	31	167.72714	<0.001

Final estimation of column level variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTCOL,c_{00k}	0.00604	0.00004	24	22.25981	>0.500

School level variables including school type and school graduation rate were then added to the model. The model is:

$$\eta_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \gamma_{01}*\text{TRADITIO}_{jk} + \gamma_{02}*\text{SCHOOLGR}_{jk} + \beta_1*GRADE_{ijk} + \beta_2*AGE_{ijk} + \beta_3*FEMALE_{ijk} + \beta_4*BLACK_{ijk} + \beta_5*SPED_{ijk} + b_{00j} + c_{00k}$$

In the model above, γ01 and γ02 are the school level variables for traditional or alternative school and the school's graduation rate. Based on the results in Table 4, the variable TRADITIO or whether the student attended a traditional school has a coefficient of 1.01. It is

significant with a p-value of .003. Students that attended a traditional school were more likely to return. The odds of returning are higher for students that went to a traditional instead of an alternative school. For the variable AGE the log-odds .0019 was not significant with a p-value of .948. In terms of gender, of those who dropped out females were .38 more likely to return. The probability of returning back to school is higher for female than male students. For the variable SCHOOLGR or school graduation rate the coefficient is .008. This variable was not significant with p-value .191but was close to the p-value of .05. Attending a school with a higher graduation rate, did not influence the odds of a student returning back to school. Level one variables: GRADE, BLACK, and FEMALE remained significant. However, the variation across schools decreased from .33 to .21. Therefore, one third of the variation across schools is explained in the model.

Table 5:School Level Variables Output

Final estimation of fixed effects: (Unit-specific model)

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	*t*-ratio	Approx. *d.f.*	*p*-value
For INTRCPT1, π_0					
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.589396	0.113558	-5.190	1804	<0.001
TRADITIO, γ_{01}	1.010169	0.314557	3.211	30	0.003
SCHOOLGR, γ_{02}	0.008410	0.006281	1.339	30	0.191
For GRADE, π_1					
INTERCEPT,θ_1	-0.183103	0.051981	-3.522	1804	<0.001
For AGE, π_2					
INTERCEPT,θ_2	0.059920	0.034265	1.749	1804	0.081
For FEMALE, π_3					
INTERCEPT,θ_3	0.389799	0.103804	3.755	1804	<0.001
For BLACK, π_4					
INTERCEPT,θ_4	0.249885	0.108284	2.308	1804	0.021
For SPED, π_5					
INTERCEPT,θ_5	0.007662	0.136874	0.056	1804	0.955

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval

Table 5 (cont'd)

For INTRCPT1, π_0			
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.589396	0.554662	(0.444,0.693)
TRADITIO, γ_{01}	1.010169	2.746065	(1.444,5.222)
SCHOOLGR, γ_{02}	0.008410	1.008446	(0.996,1.021)
For GRADE, π_1			
INTERCEPT,θ_1	-0.183103	0.832682	(0.752,0.922)
For AGE, π_2			
INTERCEPT,θ_2	0.059920	1.061751	(0.993,1.136)
For FEMALE, π_3			
INTERCEPT,θ_3	0.389799	1.476684	(1.205,1.810)
For BLACK, π_4			
INTERCEPT,θ_4	0.249885	1.283878	(1.038,1.588)
For SPED, π_5			
INTERCEPT,θ_5	0.007662	1.007691	(0.770,1.318)

Final estimation of row variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTROW,b_{00j}	0.46088	0.21241	29	101.19477	<0.001

Final estimation of column level variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTCOL,c_{00k}	0.00906	0.00008	22	21.03888	>0.500

Given that the variance across neighborhoods is .00008, adding additional variables at this level may not make a significant reduction in the variance component. However, I added the neighborhood characteristics to the model to determine if it will play a role in who returns back to school.

Final Model

$$\eta_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \gamma_{01}*\text{TRADITIO}_{jk} + \gamma_{02}*\text{SCHOOLGR}_{jk} + \mu_{03}*\text{EAST}_{jk} + \mu_{03}*\text{WEST}_{jk} + \beta_1*GRADE_{ijk} + \beta_2*AGE_{ijk} + \beta_3*FEMALE_{ijk} + \beta_4*BLACK_{ijk} + \beta_5*SPED_{ijk} + b_{00j} + c_{00k}$$

Table 6: Final Model Output
Final estimation of fixed effects: (Unit-specific model)

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	*t*-ratio	Approx. *d.f.*	*p*-value
For INTRCPT1, π_0					
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.665190	0.130439	-5.100	1804	<0.001
TRADITIO, γ_{01}	1.059696	0.314747	3.367	30	0.002
SCHOOLGR, γ_{02}	0.008949	0.006237	1.435	30	0.162
EAST, β_{03}	0.214743	0.204201	1.052	23	0.304
WEST, β_{03}	0.217133	0.183985	1.180	23	0.250
For GRADE, π_1					
INTERCEPT,θ_1	-0.186117	0.052035	-3.577	1804	<0.001
For AGE, π_2					
INTERCEPT,θ_2	0.058028	0.034317	1.691	1804	0.091
For FEMALE, π_3					
INTERCEPT,θ_3	0.394656	0.103928	3.797	1804	<0.001
For BLACK, π_4					
INTERCEPT,θ_4	0.245906	0.108370	2.269	1804	0.023
For SPED, π_5					
INTERCEPT,θ_5	0.015334	0.136902	0.112	1804	0.911

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval
For INTRCPT1, π_0			
INTERCEPT,θ_0	-0.665190	0.514176	(0.398,0.664)
TRADITIO, γ_{01}	1.059696	2.885495	(1.517,5.489)
SCHOOLGR, γ_{02}	0.008949	1.008990	(0.996,1.022)
EAST, β_{03}	0.214743	1.239543	(0.812,1.891)
WEST, β_{03}	0.217133	1.242510	(0.849,1.818)
For GRADE, π_1			
INTERCEPT,θ_1	-0.186117	0.830177	(0.750,0.919)
For AGE, π_2			
INTERCEPT,θ_2	0.058028	1.059745	(0.991,1.134)
For FEMALE, π_3			
INTERCEPT,θ_3	0.394656	1.483873	(1.210,1.820)
For BLACK, π_4			
INTERCEPT,θ_4	0.245906	1.278780	(1.034,1.582)
For SPED, π_5			
INTERCEPT,θ_5	0.015334	1.015452	(0.776,1.328)

Table 6 (cont'd)

Final estimation of row variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTROW,b_{00j}	0.44507	0.19809	27	93.96819	<0.001

Final estimation of column level variance components:

Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	*d.f.*	χ^2	*p*-value
INTRCPT1/ ICPTCOL,c_{00k}	0.00463	0.00002	20	20.54491	0.424

In the final model, the variable μ03 are the neighborhood variables, EAST and WEST added to the model. The variable TRADITIO remained significant with a p-value of .002. In addition, GRADE, FEMALE, and BLACK were significant. The variables EAST and WEST coefficients are .214 and .217 and were not significant. This suggests that the neighborhood zone that a student resides did not influence the probability of whether they returned back to high school. However, neighborhood zone did explain some of the school variation.

Summary of Findings

The quantitative phase of this study examined the characteristics of returners in an urban school district. I used district level data from the 2012-2013 academic year to run a Cross- Classified Hierarchical Generalized Linear Model of Black and Hispanic students in Roswell. In terms of student level factors that influenced re-enrolment, the findings indicated: 1) race matters in who returns for non-White youth, 2) returning is gendered, 3) students in earlier grade levels are less likely to re-enroll, 4) special education identification was not significant, and 5) age was not significant. The results indicated that there are differences in who is re-enrolling back into school. These factors are imperative to understanding the

characteristics of youth that are returning. At the second level, students that attended a traditional school were more likely to return, and a school's graduation rate did not influence re-enrollment. Despite various in-school factors that shape early school withdrawal and re-entry, attending a traditional school impacted re-enrollment. Finally, living within a particular neighborhood zone or zip code was not a significant factor for returners.

Discussion of Findings

Students of color that are returning back to school will encounter several academic and social challenges as they transition into the classroom. Still, if schools are unaware of who is coming back to school, then they will remain ill-equipped to serve the diverse needs of these students. The findings suggest that although there are racial disparities in students that leave school youth of color are choosing to return. Researchers have extensively examined early school withdrawal for Black youth (Campbell, 2004; Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Felice, 1981; Orfield, 2004) and have focused on specific time points during a student's academic career. However, by viewing the achievement of students of color as an event rather than a process, the field will continue to negate a significant population. In comparison to their racial and ethnic counterparts, Hispanic students have also been the focus on underachievement in K-12 education. Hispanic students have increasingly high rates of early school withdrawal, because "50% of Latina/o students attending large, overcrowded, urban public schools" (Rodriguez, 2008, p. 260). This study indicates that Hispanic youth are returning to school, but that there are lower probabilities of their re-enrollment in comparison to Black students. Hispanic youth have the highest rates of not completing high school (Schweitzer, 2011). Factors associated with Hispanic early school withdrawal include: financial obligation to support family members (Behnke, 2010) and language acculturation

(Lys, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). Differences in the probability of Hispanic students re-enrolling may be attributed to these student characteristics, but further research is needed to determine if these factors shape re-enrollment. Rodriguez (2008) contends that at-risk conditions shape Hispanic youth aspirations, but examining individual characteristics alone may not account for all student outcomes.

Another finding is that female students of color were more likely to return than their male counterparts. Gender is a significant factor associated with why students leave school (Center for School, Health and Education, 2013). Male students of color have been the victims of negative social stigmas, bias school treatment, and deemed to have more problem behaviors than girls. There are gender differences in the type of experiences that girls of color have in the classroom, and how they are treated by educators. For example, males of color are more likely to be disciplined, suspended, and/or expelled (Skiba et al., 2002) or be placed in the juvenile justice system (Weemhoff & Villarruel, 2011). Male students often cite higher rates of disengagement, boredom, poor teacher relationships, and school mobility as contributing to leaving school than females (Center for School, Health and Education, 2013). These aspects shape why students exit school, and can influence how males of color conceptualize returning. Bennett et al. (2009) contends "factors that affect both boys and girls may affect girls in different ways and in some cases, to a greater extent than their male peers" (p.3). Ultimately, male and female students will leave school for a variety of reasons that are complex and interrelated. Uncovering gender disparities for returning youth can provide insight to the systematic conditions that influence early school withdrawal and re-enrollment. The study also indicated that Black and Hispanic youth in earlier grades are less likely to leave school and re-enter. Instead, they are leaving the classroom closer to the time that they

had initially entered into high school. Examining factors that contribute to student disengagement in earlier grades can strengthen the connection that youth have with educators and their peers. In addition, it is imperative to analyze aspects that place students at-risk after starting high school, and how it impacts early school withdrawal. Furthermore, special education identification and age are not significant in the study. Although research contends that students placed in special education classes and older youth are more likely to leave school (Glennie et al., 2012; Toldson, 2011), the findings indicate that these factors may not be predicators of whether students will re-enroll.

Schools play an important role in whether students of color leave school. The study's findings show that students that attended a traditional school were more likely to return. Researchers assert that the schooling context is associated with lower graduation rates (Iachini et al., 2013; Mallette, 2012; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). This suggests that there are factors within traditional and alternative schools that mediate who is re-enrolling. Youth are often placed in alternative school settings due to "student behavioral issues, academic remediation, poor social skills, family or life events, and chronic absenteeism" (Jones, 2011, p. 220). Still, the placement of students of color in these spaces may be counterproductive toward their academic achievement and progression toward a diploma. More assessment is needed to determine the role that alternative schools have on why students of color leave school, and on measures that are used to support their return. Finally, the study finds that residing within a particular community did not influence re-enrollment. Creasey & Jarvis (2013) assert that neighborhood environments shape adolescent development, self-efficiency, and academic achievement. Students that live in neighborhoods that have uniform living conditions may still be affected by their environment in different ways. However, this may

not be clearly evident by solely relying on quantitative analysis conducted in more homogenous school districts.

Conclusion

The background experiences that student bring with them to the classroom, and the type of schooling environments that youth are educated plays a key role in dropout recovery. Examining how these factors impede or foster the academic achievement of students of color is imperative to developing programs that serve their needs. Without researchers focusing on returning youth of color, the field simply masks the true potential and resiliency of students that have temporarily given up on school. Further analysis is needed to determine how out-of-school and in-school factors shape why re-enrolled youth initially leave school. This includes how school actors influence how students matriculate in urban districts, power dynamics in the classroom, and culture. Additionally, how community contexts shapes the experiences of returning youth of color. contexts impacts the experiences of returning students of color.

In the next section, I conduct a Multiple Case Study of students in Roswell that returned back to high school. Their narratives provide an in-depth encounter to how various out-of-school and in-school factors created insurmountable barriers during their initial pursuit of a diploma. Their management of these multiple worlds--their neighborhood and school was vital to whether they experienced exclusion or alienation. These youth describe how they navigated, transitioned, and negotiated their identity as students, adolescents, and adults. Furthermore, they share their personal challenges, successes, and triumphs during their journey from being a “dropout” to graduating high school.

CHAPTER SIX: NAVIGATING THE SELF OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

> "Public education is often invoked to prevent social dynamite from detonating. The dropout problem is an example of one such explosives. Mere choice of the term "school dropout" suggests where to find the ignited fuse and who is responsible for stuffing it out. It is therefore fair to ask: Can the diploma really be an effective deterrent? The answer depends on whether dropping out per se is mostly responsible for the consequent penalties or whether the greatest blame rests with certain persistent human conditions that stimulate early school withdrawal and also cause the misfortunes that follow" (Tannenbaum, 1966, p. 17).

Introduction

A plethora of research literature exists that has documented the underperformance of Black and Hispanic students in K-12 education and the role that disengagement plays in graduating from high school (Ford, 2010; Howard, 2003; Smith, 20053). For students of color in urban districts, high school dropout rates are salient indicators of other disproportionate gaps in academic achievement. In 2012 the National Center for Education Statistics reported that cohort graduation rates in urban areas including Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles was over sixty percent (Cullen et al., 2013). How at-risk students of color understand their position as economic, social, and political actors and the degree that it resonates with them can play a critical role in how they will value a diploma. Given that leaving school is a long-term process, "students exhibit identifiable warning signs at least one to three years before they drop out" (Burrus & Roberts, 2012, p.3). For students of color, these indicators often go unnoticed by educators, because students are viewed as perpetrators to their own demise. The act of "dropping out" is then depicted as "individualistic, idiosyncratic, irrational, or even pathological rather than grounding them in the social context in which they occur" (Leventhal-Weiner & Wallace, 2010). This rationale further marginalizes the influence that contextual factors has on graduating, and further

negates any justifiable reasons that students express for leaving school.

Research conducted on graduation rates for urban students of color has focused on a multitude of factors that result in leaving school (Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Patterson, 2008; Ou, 2008). Rumberger & Lim (2008) assert that two categories are attributed to why students fail to graduate including: individual and institutional characteristics. Individual characteristics include family relationships and personal reasons outside of school. Institutional factors are described as teachers relationships, neighborhood conditions, and school resource constraints. These in-school and out-of-school factors can "pull" or "push" students out of the classroom. Pull-out factors are external schooling mechanisms that influence why students leave, and are viewed as a result of a cost-benefit analysis (Bardley & Renzulli, 2011). For adolescent students of color, how they determine and place value on what these costs and benefits will be is a challenging decision that is often not made alone.

Pull-out theorists view student's decisions within the context that they occur. The student is perceived holistically and they "view the adolescent in a contextual sense, in that schooling is only one important part of the adolescent's life, along with family, the labor market, peers, and churches and other organizations" (Stearns & Glennie, 206, p.31). The interconnection between societal opportunities and the institution of schooling are more pronounced for low-income students of color. However, pull and push out factors in themselves should not be viewed as binary as there are multiple interacting, oppositional, and sub-characteristics that can lead to "dropping out" of school and subsequent re-entry of students of color. By excluding the influence of external factors that contribute to why students leave school, researchers de-emphasize how context shapes educational outcomes. Portraying urban youth in this way has led to a focus on deficit-orientated thinking without

consideration to the conditions that place them at-risk (Creasey & Jarvis, 2012). This further delegitimizes the perspectives of urban youth of color and the value of a diploma in their lives.

Tryin' to Cope

As adolescents transition to adulthood they encounter a myriad of childhood and educational experiences that will influence how they rationalize attending school. Adolescents living in urban districts encounter a distinctively different set of out-of-school experience when compared to their suburban counterparts. Students of color face various stressors that are due to their racial status (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011). Urban youth residing in disadvantaged areas are exposed to various stressors including poverty and crime (Miller et al 2002) that can result in their disengagement from school. For urban students of color that leave prior to graduation, their detachment can manifest as early as elementary school to as late as 12th grade. The accumulation of early adolescent and schooling experiences can precondition students to dropout with previous exposure to other factors intersecting (Neild, 2008). These preconditions contextualize a student's behavior, values, and engagement with individuals in their community and educators in the classroom. The interactions that urban students of color have within their family unit also shapes how they view school. The perceptions that students develop become more salient are intensified within their neighborhood, and can stifle or foster their academic achievement. How youth then cope with stress can result in various negative outcomes including: anxiety, depression, underachievement, and behavioral problems (Vera et al., 2011). Although a large percentage of adolescent academic performance is influenced by stress (Kliewer et al., 2012), the impact of such stressful events on the daily lives of urban youth can make the pathway to a diploma

less of a viable goal.

In this section, I argue that the out-of-school conditions that the participants encountered resulted in: 1) what I call role performance anxiety, and 2) social stress and daily hassles. First, I argue that role performance anxiety made managing school with other home responsibilities more challenging. This directly impacted their decision to leave school and subsequently in their return. The youth that I interviewed discussed how they were performing various roles as a high school student and adolescent while simultaneously taking on the responsibilities as an adult at home. Performing these multiple roles in various contexts made prioritizing school more difficult. Additionally, several of the students experienced role-strain. This made their attempts to balance their education with out-of-school responsibilities more challenging, and in many cases emotionally strenuous. Coupled with role-strain the students were performing numerous roles that produced stress and anxiety about their academic future. Second, I use Social Stress Theory to explain how students' ability to perform various roles was mediated by the degree of social stress and daily hassles that they encountered outside of school. Many of the students were navigating family risk factors with stressors at home and in their neighborhood. In addition to being students the participants were assuming multiple adult roles and responsibilities that created social stress in various environments. Their family structure and community context intensified the emotional and physical toll of obtaining a high school diploma. Moreover, how the students managed role performance anxiety was dependent on the level of daily hassles that they experienced while not attending school.

Role Performance Anxiety

When I interviewed urban youth on their withdrawal from high school, they described

how out-of-school factors shaped and solicited them to shed their childhood in order to socially, physically, and psychologically survive in Roswell. Many of the participants expressed discontentment coupled with academic fatigue as they quickly transitioned to a new role-identity of an adult as adolescents. Several of the participants experienced role-strain, because they attempted to balance schooling expectations and home obligations while being confronted with trauma. Several of the participants experienced role performance anxiety as they struggled to meet the expectations of school. Research indicates that "inner-city communities are a distinct social ecology marked by multiple deleterious characteristics, including high concentrations of poverty, crime, and community violence; little economic investment or political concern; and high rates of high school dropout, adolescent pregnancy, and substance abuse" (Tolan & Grant, 2009, p.64). The social conditions and traumatic contexts that youth live, impacts how they experience school, and will ultimately influence the ways that they engage with peers in their community.

Role-Identity Theory and Exiting School

Urban youth that are labeled "at-risk" will encounter numerous out-of-school barriers. These obstacles create both tangible and intangible consequences for students of color that can constrain their academic achievement. The type of identities that are ascribed to low-income urban students of color will play a significant role in how society will ultimately label them as misfits, dangerous perpetrators, and simply as unwanted bodies that enter and exit classrooms like a revolving door. However, such conscious and unconscious categorizations of Black and Hispanic urban youth fails to consider that student identities "are not located solely in the individual, but rather are negotiated in social interactions that take form in cultural spaces; they develop within and through social practice" (Rubin, 2007, p. 221).

Stryker (1968) asserts “identities exist insofar as persons are participants in structured social relationships” (p. 559). Students that leave school have unique social interactions and relationships that cultivate their identities in distinct ways than students that stay in the classroom. Pull-out factors condition, shape, and mold the identities that urban students of color will ultimately choose to embrace or distance themselves from on a daily basis. I use role-identity theory to examine key pull-out factors that the students highlighted as influencing their withdrawal from high school.

For example, Flores-Gonzalez (2002) used role-identity theory to examine the experiences of Chicano/a youth. Analyzing how Black and Hispanic urban youth embody particular school values, norms, and expectations is significant to understanding the paths that students take to reach graduation. Role-identity theory examines how individuals occupy specific roles within society, the value that is placed on their position, and their interpretation of that role. How an individual perceives of the self is dependent on the role that they have in society and their positionality (White et al., 2008) within the social structure. Multiple worlds including the neighborhood and school are social institutions that continuously reinforce certain cultural beliefs, practices, and behaviors can be contradictory for many urban students of color. How these students then acquire and perform their perceived role within these multiple contexts is vital to understanding how school becomes disconnected from them. Flores-Gonzalez (2002) categorizes role-identity theory into subordinate and dominant identities on a hierarchical scale. Based on their gender status and social class, youth of color can have competing identities that are often viewed by educators as exhibiting oppositional behavior or by peers as “acting white”. The type of role-identities that urban youth acquire are racially and ethnically situated and socially constructed. Negative representations of

urban students of color influence how they come to value and place meaning on their education. Context shapes the self as it is "constructed in response to stereotypes and biases, and those stereotypes are a primary lens through which one views and evaluates the self" (Way et al., 2013, p.409). Flores-Gonzalez's (2002) concept of subordinate and dominant identities asserts that "a dominant identity may become subordinate or abandoned when it stops being relevant or socioculturally appropriate, or is outgrown" (p. 14). Still, the relevancy of obtaining a high school diploma may still remain for many students that are pulled out of school, but can be masked by other externally motivated responsibilities. Students may have to decide between an inescapable choice--a diploma or family survival. This shedding of their childhood can in many cases create academic impediments in the classroom while simultaneously accelerating them into adulthood at home.

Social Stress Theory and Daily Hassles

Many urban adolescents encounter neighborhood events that can produce emotional and psychological challenges. These stressors can originate out-of-school but can transition to the classroom. Furthermore, the neighborhood environment can provide supportive mechanisms for student academic success or create structural challenges that can lead to early school withdrawal. Social Stress Theory poses that how society is organized is imperative to understanding byproducts of how stress is manifested. More specifically, Social Stress Theory asserts that "disenfranchised populations might experience increased stress because of the inequalities found in the social organization in which the individual or family is embedded" (Cervantes & Cordova, 2011, p.337). These social inequalities are embedded within the contexts that urban adolescents encounter, and are visible through underemployment, the criminal justice system, and housing. Attar et al. (1997) asserts that

negative life events or daily hassles that surround individuals within their environment can produce stressful situations. Daily hassles derive from a continual agitation from social interactions with parents, peers, or educational responsibilities (Attar, 1994). The interactions that students have outside of school, and their associations with friends and adults can foster or disrupt the type of engagement that they have across various domains.

Lazarus (1984) contends that daily hassles are "experiences and conditions of daily living that have been appraised as salient and harmful or threatening to the endorser's well-being" (Miller &McIntosh 2011, p.376). Such salient or threatening events are perceived by the individual to be worrisome, impending on personal time, or hassles that affect their ability to focus on school.

Additionally, daily hassles can be evident in the type of relationships that urban students of color have with adults including their parents and/or guardians. Lazarus argues that daily hassles can be manifested through: 1) contextual factors, 2) recurring factors in an environment, 3) continual emotional concern, and 4) anguish experienced in reaction to an event (Miller & McIntosh, 2011). The environments in which urban youth dwell, and how they handle recurring stressors in those contexts, impacts their ability to focus on school. Daily hassles can act as stepping stones or as impassable hurdles that steer students off the track to a diploma. Rather than serving as obstacles, they can become inescapable stressors that can not be navigated but only endured. Examining the degree that urban students of color experience daily hassles outside of school is critical to understanding whether they will become disconnected from the classroom, and if it will result in their mass exodus.

Teenage Pregnancy

Pregnancy is one of the most popular reasons for adolescent girls not graduating from high school. Teen mothers encounter difficulties in attending and graduating school (Domenico, 2007). Research suggests that the educational outcomes for these students are overtly negative, because female adolescent mothers have a lower rate of graduating high school or college, and are often already on a downward educational spiral (Basch, 2011). Still, not all challenges that pregnant girls face are the same. Adolescent girls of color experience school in distinctive ways that are mediated by the intersection of race and gender in the classroom. When compared to their white counterparts, high school aged female students of color have higher rates of self reporting that they withdrew from school due to expecting a baby at 36% and 38% for Hispanic and African American girls respectively (America's Promise, 2012). There are racial gaps in the percentage of adolescent pregnancies as well as a stigma attached to urban female students of color that further marginalizes their presence in school. These girls are not viewed as innocent but rather "the stereotypical Urban Girl is assumed to be poor, of color, out of control…at risk and at fault; she embodies the problem of teenage pregnancy...she is female adolescent sexuality" (Brubaker, 2007, p.530). Such negative conceptions of urban female students of color shapes how they may view themselves in school, and the value that they then will place on themselves as pregnant youth.

Two students that I interviewed were negotiating the roles of being a high school student with motherhood. Darri became pregnant in 6th grade. Mia had her first child in high school.

Dorothy: Why did you end up leaving school?

Darri: Due to pregnancy and...feeling not...feeling like I'm not like everyone else

basically...yeah. I felt abnormal and I just wanted to be pregnant I guess.

Dorothy: You said you feel like you weren't normal? Why would you say that?

Darri: Because other youth girls were like doing things...ya know, with their lives...and ...I was pregnant and I didn't really do much.

Dorothy: How would you describe being pregnant.

Darri: Overwhelming.

Dorothy: Why would you say that?

Darri: It's like numerous things you have to do...you have to be really ready...and you have to have like your focus on school and you have to also focus on that...your about to have a baby and stuff like that...and it's really hard!

Darri described how she felt being pregnant and having to negotiate school. Her comments illustrate how she experienced role-strain and the difficulties of balancing the student role with parenthood. Performing these multiple roles was challenging, because the responsibilities of motherhood increased her level of social stress and daily hassles outside of the classroom. When recalling being pregnant in middle school, Darri describes that she felt "abnormal" as she was unable to do activities that she perceived other girls her age were able to enjoy. For expecting teen mothers, being pregnant alters the type of relationships that one has, results in appearance changes, and redefines one's identity (Brubaker & Wright, 2006). Research conducted on Black teenage girls' feelings on being pregnant has indicated that there is a "lack of shame experienced by poor Black adolescents, and if shame was experienced, it did not last long" (Winters, 2012, p. 3). Although Darri did not say that she was shamed by being pregnant, her statement about "feeling like I'm not like everyone else" points to the exclusionary marker that Darri believed that was ascribed to her as a student and soon to be parent. The distancing of herself from other girls in school due to her

characterization of being abnormal reinforces the complex role of being a teenage mother while contemplating whether to remain in school. Focusing on school was challenging for Darri, because she had to perform numerous role orientations as a 13 year old mother. Pregnant teens and expecting mothers will have to balance two different worlds: in-school and out-of-school.

Darri then explained how she felt after leaving school due to her pregnancy.

Dorothy: Why would you say depressed?

Darri: Umm...cause I was just...I was 13...and like...just like really young...and there's nothing that I can really do and I just felt like there was no resources and no options.

Dorothy: And why did you say confused?

Darri: Cause I...I didn't know what next steps...what next step to take...so..it was just very confusing for me.

How teenage mothers are able to connect with resources and information that supports their new role will impact whether they leave school. Darri believed that she had few opportunities and supportive structures for her and her new baby. Pillow (2004) contends that "subtle and not-so-subtle practices create a climate of stress, regulation, and surveillance for the pregnant teen, and many pregnant teens already experiencing stress of an unplanned pregnancy, will choose to leave school" (p. 124). Darri previously stated that her pregnancy made her feel embarrassed and isolated, because she felt abnormal and not like other girls. Not knowing what direction to turn to can often leave teenage mothers confused and ill-equipped to adequately care for their children.

Mia had a child during her senior year and explained "I had problems staying in a actual high school because I had kids. They told me, they needed me to be in school...I was

unable to be there". In comparison to Darri, Mia discussed the daily responsibilities of being a mother.

> **Dorothy**: How was that having kids but then also trying to go to school?
>
> **Mia**: It is a struggle because you have to find day care. You have to find a school that has the right hours, if they can make it. You have to find a way to transportation. So it took a good eight months just to find a way back into school.
>
> **Dorothy**: Why you think it took like that long?
>
> **Mia**: Because my kids were newborns...and I wasn't comfortable leaving them in daycare. And then there was one daycare I had trouble with so I had to transfer them to another daycare, because one daycare was really messing with my kid's stuff so I was like; oh I gotta transfer…and then the other daycare had different hours, different rules and stuff like that.

Mia discusses how her personal experience with maintaining daycare and transportation influenced her decision to not attend school. She explains that locating daycare with acceptable days and times was challenging, because she had to determine how to transport herself and her children to school. For adolescent moms "childcare and transportation are consistently listed as the two major obstacles a teen mother encounters attending school or maintaining employment, most schools do not offer on-site child care" (Pillow, 2004, p. 165). Mia's assertion that going to school is a "struggle because you have to find daycare" speaks to the importance of childcare services for teen mothers to finish their education. Researchers assert that teen moms are unable to remain home with their children, and have difficulties attending school due to finding reasonable daycare (Fagan et al., 1991, Pillow, 2004). Although staying at home with newborns may be more desirable for Mia, her role as a mother and student overlap in the time, space, and energy needed to be able to manage both worlds. Still, teenage mothers may question the type of childcare that their children receive if they are

left in unsafe places with inadequate resources while they are attending high school.

Additionally, Mia and Darri spoke about the challenges of being a teenage mother and her experience with pregnancy.

> **Dorothy**: Do you feel like when you weren't in school alot of people thought bad about you?
>
> **Darri**: Yes I did.
>
> **Dorothy**: Why would you say that?
>
> **Darri**: Because like people thought I wasn't gonna make it and I was just gonna be a stay at home mom all the time.

Darri believed that her peers thought negatively about her because she was pregnant at such a young age. She says that other students believed that she would never make her way back into school. Instead, Darri's new place would be at home with her child and not getting an education. During my interview with Mia she contended that people judge teenage mothers.

> **Mia:** Yeah we made a mistake, but you know if a person who has a kid and still wanted to push forward...I don't think no one should ever think...because they don't know whose story you know now a days. I can look like crap one day, but you don't know my story. So I feel like before anybody judges...I feel like they should have to get to know the person.

Mia spoke adamantly about pregnant teenage mothers, and suggests that "we made a mistake". Her comments are illustrative of Pillow's (2004) study on teenage mothers that suggests that making a mistake does not mean teen others should be "ashamed or immoral" (p.28). She signifies that getting pregnant was not a desirable outcome. Mia focuses on the mistake of getting pregnant, and then refocuses on the strides that adolescents make moving forward as what matters. Additionally, both students spoke about how society judges adolescent mothers and they believed that their peers thought negatively about them for

getting pregnant. Darri said that her peers doubted her when she left school without graduating. By pointing out that society judges teen mothers without knowing their story, she tries to be restored from what Kelly (2006) calls a wrong-girl frame. The wrong-girl frame suggests that teenage mothers are from dysfunctional environments, and make bad life choices as they are products of children having children. Still, focusing on a teen's pregnancy as good or bad negates how contextual factors play into their transition to motherhood. The wrong-girl model "distorts our understanding of how social conditions and cultural forces converge to create isolation, troubled relationships, and little support for many teenage girls but especially girls living in poverty at a pivotal point in their lives" (Pillow, 2004, p. 27). Mia and Darri's pregnancy highlights prevalent adolescent concerns on race, gender, and representations of femininity as pure constructs. The constructs are most evident in the lives of female students of color living in economic disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Additionally, Mia's comments coincide with Kelly's (2001) ethnographic study on fifty teen aged mothers. The study asserted the need to speak directly with pregnant adolescents to get the "actual facts" as some "didn't mean to get pregnant". Similar sentiments were expressed by Mia who stated "you don't know my story. She believes that people should be more engaged in their lives before judging what it's like to be a teen mother. Female adolescent students of color who become pregnant face various obstacles in graduating high school that white teen mothers are often able to avoid. Pillow's study illustrates how White females' pregnancies often remained invisible because they are home schooled, receive out-of-school tutoring, and subsequently return once giving birth. Pillow found that this led to the ideal that teen pregnancy was a "minority" issue due to the lack of white females in school-based initiatives. However, listening to the stories of teenage

pregnancy including their experiences, adaptation strategies, and educational pursuits before and after having children can shed light to their silenced narratives.

Unstable Parent Relationships

Understanding how urban students of color experience daily hassles are vital, because these factors co-construct their identity at school and as adolescents at home. When I asked the students what they would say if they had a chance to write a book about the story of their life, many of the students stated: “It’s complicated”, “I had to grow up fast”, “You don’t get what you want” or “I had a rough life”. In particular, several of the students discussed how negative relationships with their parents influenced how they thought about themselves in school. They expressed frustration with their parents which resulting in moving out of the house to live with a relative, constant mobility, or becoming homeless while in high school. Four of the students talked about having negative relationships with their mother while one made comments about their father.

Gabriella reflected on her experience with depression while in high school and her relationship with her mother.

> **Gabriella**: When I was depressed...when I went through depression in 10th grade, I missed half of the year. So I...I don’t know how I'm a senior now (short laugh). I look at it, I'm like how am I a senior because I missed like everything in that school, in my grade. And I was like, this is so weird. I'm like and I feel like even though I was depressed...I'm like, I always tell myself because I had to stay back in 1st grade, because I was always in and out...because my mom would always be in court with my birth dad.

Gabriella spoke candidly about dealing with depression and how it affected her focus on school. Her depression resulted in her being hospitalized for several months in 10th grade. A study by Quiroga et al. (2012) indicated that depression is a critical factor in the process of

early school withdrawal for at-risk youth. Gabriella's inability to manage her depression contributed to the degree of isolation that she felt from her mother at home. Additionally, Gabriella felt isolated from her peers at school and was behind academically. Consequently, for many students with depression their condition has been overlooked in educational research as a risk factor (Quiroga et.al, 2013). Still, this concern has played a key role in Gabriella's ability to attend school. Gabriella says that she had to repeat 1st grade. Even though she is a senior in high school, she is reminded of being held back in elementary school. Her acknowledgement underscores the lasting effects that grade retention had on her student identity. Grade retention is considered another factor related to early school withdrawal. The primary objective for retaining students is for them to meet academic standards or levels of achievement for their grade level. Still, Stearns et al. (2007) contends that "in reality many factors including race, socioeconomic status, and family structure play a role in deciding which students are retained" (p. 212). Gabriella was not being held back in 1st grade due to poor academic performance, but because she was not attending regularly. She believes that being in the middle of a custody battle between her mother and father made her miss days in school. This was not by personal choice.

Gabriella also talked about having problems living with her mother during her senior year.

> **Gabriella**: I lived with my mom mainly my whole life through school. This year, senior year, it's basically, we went into a conflict and I just left. She kicked me out of the house. I told her that; it was getting so heated...I told her that once I go to... once I applied to college, I am going to live at the dorm. She said no, get out now! So I had to move out. So I moved out...I moved into my aunt's house, which is her sister.
>
> **Gabriella**: Now kids like me...it was...the negative environment for me was my house. There were days like I didn't want to even get up. Like not even to like shop or go to school...nothing. Everything was...all my interests was just basically I don't want

> to do anything. I don't even want to live. Because it was just too much for me, it was like problems in home and in school. That's why I was like, why should I be in school? Like I don't get free...like not even at home I'd get a break from drama. I don't even get a break in school.

Instead of focusing on her senior year of high school, Gabriella was moving from her mother's house to live with her aunt. This created an environment where she felt emotionally drained and thought about suicide. Research suggests that low-income youth that move to various households have a series of negative outcomes (Gasper et al., 2011). For example, students that are mobile during their high school years are more prone to have poor academic performance, increased levels of disengagement, and low self-esteem. Moving from her mom's house to her aunt's house during her senior year is an example of the type of out-of-school transitions that she had to make while getting her education. Gabriella was managing the student role with stressors outside of school. Coupled with performing well academically, Gabriella was trying to negotiate various social stressors and daily hassles including depression, a strained relationship with her mother, and having to move to her aunt's house. She had lost interest in attending school and in living at home under her current condition. These daily hassles served to give her no reprieve because she believed that there was no way out.

Similar to Gabriella, Taya and Kara mentioned how having a strained relationship with their mother resulted in them leaving home.

> **Taya**: I lived with my mom for a little while. My brother he wasn't around...he was locked up...and my sister she lived on her own she had her kids and so she left. So I was really by myself. But me and my mother didn't really agree on alot of things...so I left my house when I was 16, I didn't live with my mom, I lived with my aunt.

Kara: I stay with my mom and my boyfriend because...I...really get frustrated being at
my mom's house and...the way how she is..irks me so...you know? When she gets in her moments I be like...you know what, I'm leaving...I can't be here...and I leave.

Vergudo (2002) asserts that there are family risk factors that make youth more prone to leaving school prior to graduation including being from a single parent household, unstable parent relationships, and separation or divorce. These family risk factors can interact with other domains including the neighborhood and school. Taya and Kara had social stressors at home that intensified the type of family risk factors that they were exposed to on a daily basis. Having to be mobile as they moved from house to house was another added level of stress that they had to navigate outside of school. For example, Taya and Kara lived in a single parent household and had unstable parent relationships. Taya lived with her mother but consequently felt that she was alone. Confrontations with her mother led to her decision to move out of the house at 16 years old to live with her aunt. Taya believed that she would get along better with her mother if she was in another environment. Kara also had problems with her mother but it resulted in her living at two residences. For Kara, she has a unique housing situation because she lives with her mother occasionally. When Kara and her mother have disagreements she leaves the house to stay with her boyfriend until things cool down. The interactions that Taya and Kara had with their mother required them to escape their home because they did not feel welcomed.

I then asked Taya to describe what was difficult for her growing up and she cited her mother.

Dorothy: Why would you say your mom?

Taya: Cause my mother was...my mother put me through alot! Like...she...I just had a

rough life with my mom. My father died when I was 8 and like...basically I blame her...like I don't blame her but like she moved me out of Roswell.

Taya expressed alot of resentment toward her mother. During the interview, she was often unsure of how to express her feelings and what to say about her relationship with her mother. This led to her pausing and just sighing. Taya mentioned how she somewhat blames her mother for her father's death, although she did not want to talk about what exactly happened. Taya believes that her mother put her through alot of stress as a child, and this intensified after they moved out of Roswell to attend a school in another district. After moving, Taya was jumped at school for being gay. She expresses anger toward her mom for some of the events that happened during her adolescence. The type of relationships that students have with their parents can be one of support or of discord. Their ability to manage these types of interactions is important to how they communicate with other adults.

I then spoke with Bacari about his upbringing.

Dorothy: If you had to say something about how it was like growing up what would you say?

Bacari: Difficult

Dorothy: Why difficult?

Bacari: Cause my mom was weird…she raised me weird like treated me how you would a kid living in the house...so she would like...the way she talked...the way she acted...cause when my mom was younger her parents died when she was two...so...they were murdered. And ah...my grandmother was deep deep deep an old fashioned southern so she raised me the same exact way so it's difficult seeing other kids being raised a certain way and then I was being raised a certain way.

Coming from a single parent low-income household in Roswell, Bacari was also exposed to

various family risk factors that made him more prone to leaving school. However, Bacari points out how his mother's disciplinary style was not comforting to him as an adolescent. Research points to the role that parenting styles has on early school withdrawal (Rumberger et al., 1990). The communicative styles and disciplinary practices that parents have with their children can impact academic performance and engagement in school. Bacari states that his mother's parents were murdered when she was younger. Bacari expressed disappointment for not being able to do what other kids could at his age. This included hanging out with peers after school, and the fact that he had a strict curfew. This created a somewhat strained relationship with his mother. In comparison to the students that discussed their relationship with their mother, Jacob talked about the treatment of his father.

> **Jacob:** My father, he kicked me out too when I was like umm..12 and...everyone's like... how come he kicked you out? How come he kicked you out? And everybody wants to know who my father is and they're like...and they can't believe that he's like that and whatever. And even my mom...my mother...my mother's just like…that's not how he should be you know?

Jacob was kicked out of his father's house at the age of 12. He was surprised that his father put him out of the house but did not go to live with his mother. Jacob has an estranged relationship with his father. His interaction with his father has resulted in various daily hassles and stressful out-of-school conditions that he found to difficult to cope. After a physical altercation with his father, Jacob was arrested by the police and is currently being charged for assault. After leaving his father's house, Jacob moved in with several relatives until eventually becoming homeless.

> **Jacob:** I had a car that I was sleeping in, but my uncle...like...it's crazy cause my uncle like stay here too and I asked him could I put my car in his yard and he said I

> could put my car there, but he didn't want me to stay in the house cause I didn't have no money to pay him, to stay there and I didn't understand that cause I'm his family you know...and I couldn't understand how I couldn't stay here if I'm your family but...and I thought...oh, it all about money. And that's how it is in America. Everything is about money yo. But in the islands everything's like...it's family so...I mean, that gave me a wakeup call like, I can't be around without money you know? You're not really nothing without money...especially here.

Children and adolescents have become the new face of homelessness as youth. Under the age of 18 they make up approximately 1.5 to 2 million of the homeless population while individuals aged 18 to 24 account for 750,000 to 2 million cases (Dworsky, 2010). For a period that Jacob was homeless he slept in a car. He attempted to park his car at his uncle's home during the day, but was not allowed to stay in his uncle's house. Jacob was upset that his uncle requested money for him to reside at his residence. Jacob was confused about why his uncle would want money from him, because being homeless is "at the severe end of a continuum of economic hardship and social exclusion" (Hyman et al., 2011, p.254). Jacob was feeling socially isolated and discarded by his family members. He believed that they valued money over family, and questioned the morals that they acquired after moving to America. While in school he had few options for where he could live. For students that are homeless, they have to negotiate more than just completing school assignments, but in meeting their basic needs for survival. Urban youth of color with limited family support can view school as less of a priority, because the payoff may not be as evident.

The environments that students grow up in, live, and breathe on a daily basis shapes the type of values and beliefs that they will have about their future. The students discussed how parent relationships with their mother and father impacted them outside of school. These unstable relationships impacted how they were able to perform the student role with other

responsibilities. Moreover, the students outlined how they had to manage multiple social stressors and daily hassles in their performance of these roles within various institutions. What Black and Hispanic urban youth endure or have to cope with outside of the classroom is important to whether they will be focused on school or distracted by other factors. Physical transitions coupled with stressors and daily hassles may not be a simple event or series of incidences that adolescents can negotiate. There are different norms and rules that exist within the various households that young people transition between. Additionally, there are multiple and often conflicting interactions that youth have with adults external to school that impact the interpersonal relationships that they have with teachers and administrators. Having to constantly relocate to different households and neighborhoods throughout the school year can eventually place an emotional weight and academic toll on urban adolescents.

Employment and School

A majority of teenage youth have some type of employment while attending high school (Warren, et al., 2006). Working provides a sense of independence and economic gain for adolescent youth, and it allows them to perform different roles within various worlds of school and work. Students that seek work while attending high school are looking to have an alternative method for gettin' money or earning money. The intersection of race and social class in understanding why students leave school is critical, because both identity markers interact and influence academic disengagement and early school withdrawal. Students that reside in disadvantaged neighborhoods work for distinctively different reasons than the typical student (Entwisle, 2005). There are many reasons why low-income and minority students seek employment outside of high school that are different from their higher socioeconomic status white counterparts. Entering the world of work for these students may

be viewed as a method for obtaining financial means and responsibilities as they transition into adulthood. Additionally, students may feel a sense of obligation and are ultimately "pulled out" of school to support their household and to provide for their siblings or children. In terms of race, students from non-white racial groups may seek employment as a method for assisting their household with financial needs. Non-white youth of color have "a stronger sense of obligation to support their families than European American peers" (Creasey & Jarvis, 2012, p.79). Although teenage employment may be vital to sustaining one's household to survive, there are several risk factors associated with the necessity for work, its intensity, and the type of employment that students have on leaving high school.

Employment is another reason why some of the students that I interviewed cited for leaving school. Devon mentioned that he left school to make money as it provided him immediate and tangible benefits. He also began losing interest in school.

> **Dorothy:** So why did you decide to leave school?
>
> **Devon:** Well, I...I left just basically to work. I was kinda tired of it {school} so I was like yeah...I figure I could just work full-time so that I can make money now.
>
> **Devon:** I dropped out so many times too! And it's like...the first time I dropped out things were really starting...to get money and I was like..yeah! I don't need to go back to this school. I came back to school and I was like...I actually encouraged my friends to dropout of school. I was like yeah...this money here! And they were listening to me too. And I'm like...you...you gotta come with me.
>
> **Dorothy:** That was in high school?
>
> **Devon:** Yeah...that was sophomore year and I'm like...yeah! Yall need to come get with this money...and they were like...yeah we need to get with that. And I'm like...alright...like things were really falling. And then I'm just like yo...it's not gonna last... it's not gonna last. And then...then...it was just starting to fall and slipping away from me. It was like a movie like...and you seen Paid in Full right? And I was like Rico {laughs} and I'm like ok. I need to get back into school. I'm going back to school...and then I'm just like...but then that job and that life...it's just not worth it.

> It's just not worth it. I wish that I could tell kids like...yeah...you need to stay in school.

Devon perceived working as an alternative space for success because school was not for him. Money seemed to have a greater intrinsic value and necessity in his present circumstance than a diploma. Devon stated that he left school to work full-time so that he could "make money now". In Devon's case, he made a cost-benefit analysis in his decision to leave and believed that work had more to offer him. The cost of a diploma was becoming more "tired" of attending school while the benefit of leaving was making money. Like many low-income students of color, Devon left school for what he believed to be a better alternative (McNeil, 1997). However, as he started to get less hours and money, he became disinterested in working and questioned his decision to leave school.

Like Devon, Mia said that working seemed to be a better option.

> **Mia:** School is just not for me. I'm wasting my time. I just need a job. But I noticed $8...and $7 an hour job...$8 an hour job. I don't want to work those hours and getting paid so much less.
>
> **Dorothy:** Yeah.
>
> **Mia**: Like I feel it's not fair like, why am I getting $7 an hour to work in the kitchen busting my butt off to get a $90 check. I feel like that ain't fair for that. I just feel like it's not fair that's what I feel like now... instead of relying on the government. I mean, I feel like the government it's like if you really...really have no family...you have no friends. I mean they're acting like the government is a quick getaway for some people. And then some people get kids just to get the money from the government...like nowadays.

Mia has two children. She had one child in 11th grade and another child in 12th grade. She was living at her mother's house, and constantly questioned her ability to graduate high school. For some low-income urban youth negotiating school with work is more challenging, because the rewards of graduation require delayed gratification. The performance of the

employee and student role in addition to the multiple identities that plague adolescence can cause role-strain. Simply, youth of color may perceived both to be unobtainable. For example, Mia faced several challenges of balancing her role as a "parent" with being a "student". Youth that experience role-strain will have difficulty balancing different roles simultaneously. These functions are not congruent but have competing objectives and responsibilities. When Mia decided to leave school, she believed that it was not for her. She thought that getting a job would be more beneficial. Like Devon, it seemed to be a waste of time. However, after entering into the world of minimum wage work without a diploma Mia started to question whether it was truly the best idea. Warren & Catilda (2006) assert that the relative worth presupposes that "some students perceive paid employment to be more worthwhile or rewarding than completing high school, and that intensive employment during high school is a precursor to dropping out of high school" (p.122). Mia and Devon had the perception that working would be more rewarding than school. For Mia, it would allow her to get off of government assistance. Previously, Mia mentioned her desire to get off of welfare as she wanted to be financially independent. Entering into the workforce would allow her to not have to "rely on the government" while at the same time requiring her to leave school and place a diploma on the back burner. Mia was being pulled-out of school because of the allure of employment. Additionally, so that she could cut her economic attachment to welfare. Mia also discussed the challenges of working. Mia: But then it's like with the job issue, everybody trying to find a job. I feel like that's another reason why people fall back too, because they make us struggle so much to get a job and then we have to lie in a suit and we're this and we're that. And I hate how we have to go to an interview looking professional just to show. I feel like I should go in my regular clothes, show you all the things I have to

and let you know I'm serious about working.

> **Mia**: I feel like… I don't know…I feel like we will be fake to ourselves, because I don't wear interview clothes like that. So I feel like I'm lying and that like, because I'm lying I don't really have a good...umm...feeling that I'm gonna get the job. Because I have to worry about...oh my God! She doesn't like this! Oh man. That's a lot of umm...worry.

Students living in disadvantaged communities "are often defined by structural and sociodemographic characteristics, such as persistent/intergenerational poverty, geographic and social isolation from majority culture, under/unemployment, and ethnic/racial segregation" (Stawicki & Hirsh, 2012, p. 15). The structural characteristics of their neighborhood can regulate their exposure to various risk factors including lack of employment opportunities. Mia noted that everyone in her community is trying to find a job and that it is a struggle to find one. After getting a job, she points out that you have to "lie in a suit" and questions the cultural norms and codes that are associated with seeking employment. She equates the struggle to find a job and the lack of personal authenticity as having to lie about her identity. She also resists having to follow hegemonic norms that are deemed professional by employers.

The cultural capital that students bring with them to school in many ways is performed at home and within the workforce. Carter (2003) describes Mia's concerns as *cultural default*. *C*ultural default is "regarded as normal or regular-namely, white, middle-class standards of speech, dress, musical tastes, and interactional styles" (p.137). She suggests that she "will be a fake" which further highlights the incongruent yet persistent pressure for students of color to acquire ways of knowing and being that are rooted in non-white cultural standards. Her desire to wear "regular clothes" illustrates how she tries to

distance herself from the behavioral and physical expectations for work, because Mia perceives that it will be evident that she is not being herself. Mia says that there is a threat of her being discovered as not having dominant cultural capital. Instead she sees this requirement as a hoop that she has to jump through to get a job. In many ways, Mia believed that she was acting like an imposter. She began to reconsider school as an alternative and a better method for social mobility than adolescent employment.

In comparison to Devon and Mia, several other students discussed how money was critical to their survival as they needed to work to support themselves. Lucas talked about why working was more of a viable option than attending school.

> **Dorothy**: Was there anything that was hard about growing up?
>
> **Lucas**: Um, yeah, I would say paying rent. That's enough.
>
> **Dorothy:** So why would you say that?
>
> **Lucas**: Because it's you know…like it's just like a step of knowing and paying rent, paying your phone bill… being an adult.
>
> **Dorothy**: So you had to do that like while you were in school?
>
> **Lucas**: I was working yeah...so I went to school where you know I was actually working to pay my rent and pay my phone.

Lucas was responsible for contributing to household expenses including rent and paying his phone bill. He highlights how working for many students is viewed as one of the first few steps to becoming an adult as he carried what he believed to be adult responsibilities. Lucas underscores how some youth may be "eager to shed the student role in favor of a role in which they can earn money and be regarded as an adult" (Entwisle, 2005, p.6-7). The shedding of the student role can consequently in many ways result in less time attributed to

academics and subsequent “dropout” episodes. Students that seek employment while attending school as Lucas mentioned are not only negotiating school and work but additionally the transition to adulthood. This state of negotiation can be challenging for many students that have yet to see how education and more specifically a diploma has manifested in their lives.

When I asked Bacari about work he stated that he loved money due to his upbringing.

Dorothy: Why did you say that you love money?

Bacari: Growing up I never had alot so...I’m just...anyway that I can get it I just try to get it...legally of course {laughs}...I’m good at keeping it and like...basically I don’t spend it on no stupid stuff...I like to save to buy stuff .

For students similar to Bacari, living in a low-income neighborhood and family can make having money more critical at an age when the opportunity to work becomes possible. He values money as he likes to keep it for personal items that he may not be able to afford otherwise. Kara discussed how several factors played into her desire to work while in high school as she was performing various conflicting roles that impacted her education. She was balancing school with work and would often arrive to class late.

Dorothy: Why would you say you ended up leaving school?

Kara: Well, I would wake up late..mostly...like everyday...so...and then I had a job so I be tryin’ to do two things at one time...cause I was working when I first started school but the manager wants to be...you know, an asshole and not give me hours so I had to find myself another job. I was trying to handle three things at a time.

Dorothy: So you were going to school and working, so like how many hours were you working?

Kara: 40 hours cause I would get paid $11 an hour so I used to stay….since Garfield High was like...you know, if you’re working you can leave school early and you get credit for working...so I used to work from 12’oclock to 11 at night.

Dorothy: Was that something you really wanted to do?

Kara: I needed to make money somehow...so.

Economically disadvantaged students and youth of color may choose to work higher hours to pay for family obligations and education costs instead of using it unrestrictedly (Bachman et. al., 2013). Kara had difficulty balancing work and school as she would often work the equivalent of a full-time job. Her attempt to manage these roles created a high degree of social stress, because she was performing three roles in several different worlds as a student and an employee. Lee & Staff (2007) argue that "the lowest socioeconomic origins tend to work the greatest number of hours in high school and have the highest risk of high school dropout; non-white youths average more hours of paid work in adolescence than do white youths and have twice the rate of school dropout" (p.159). Researchers also contend that working at least twenty hours per week or part-time have been associated with lower academic achievement (Pickering & Vazsonyi, 2002). Although Kara was able to earn credit at school toward her diploma for working, the need to make money resulted in her being tardy to school as she would oversleep or wake up late. She was holding two jobs and attending high school making her more at-risk for physical fatigue, lack of sleep at night and during the day (Laberge, et. al, 2011). Like Kara, Taya also left school to work.

Taya: I just stopped going. And I was going to work...and that's what made it worse because I was putting work before school.

Dorothy: Why you think you put work first?

Taya: Cause I had to get my own money because my mother wasn't gonna give me money...so...I don't know...that's why.

Taya and Kara both placed work before school. Taya openly acknowledged that this was not

a good decision when she stopped attending school. Despite notions that working can assist families financially as youth are able to buy items that their parents normally would (Mortimer, 2010) Taya did not have this luxury. She wanted to work to provide for herself as her mother did not give her money for the items that she considered necessities. All of the students expressed an immediate need for working to help pay bills, as an alternative to school, or to provide for their own expenses. High school employment is not only a risk factor for leaving school for low-income students of color, but also a financial risk factor if the students stay in school to seek a diploma. In this way, having to work is a stressor and daily hassle that many of the students that I interviewed had to balance with the student role. Leaving school was viewed as a pathway to an immediate payoff that was not as evident in the classroom. Many of the students placed work before school but did not eliminate getting an education completely as an alternative. It still served to be an important role that they kept available in case they had the opportunity to come back.

Living in the Hood

Students are depicted as living in the "hood" if they reside in the projects or subsided governmental housing. Many of the youth that I interviewed said that they lived in the "hood" or what they called the "ghetto". Society has negatively associated these environments with crime, unemployment, and deteriorating housing conditions with limited social and economic mobility. Exposure to these factors often place students at-risk for failure in school. Wilson (2011) contends "neighborhoods in concentrated poverty are seen as dangerous, and therefore they become isolated socially and economically, as people go out of their way to avoid them" (p.11). Consequently, urban students of color that live in the most disadvantaged and high

crime areas are unable to fully escape or retreat from these toxic contexts. The neighborhood is a social structure that impacts student achievement in addition to schools, because where students reside outside of school influences their level of academic performance (Owens, 2010). The environmental context including peer associations, social networks, and culture embedded within the community play a critical role in how urban youth come to value school. These factors mediate the type of experiences and beliefs that students bring with them to the classroom.

Another constant theme from the students I interviewed was the role that being in a "good" v. "bad" neighborhood plays in their lives on leaving school. Half of the students said that they had lived or were currently residing in what is considered a "bad" neighborhood. They used words like "shootouts" and "hot neighborhood" to describe what they defined as bad. The other students that said they lived in a "good" community and determined this by the proximity to their exposure of what they considered "bad". The out-of-school environments that the students engaged with on a daily basis created a layer of uncertainty for safety for some, and protective factors for others. Kara described her neighborhood experiences.

> **Kara:** Well, the neighborhood....umm...shootouts...something just happened a few days ago…so...I be like...that's why I don't barely be...I'll just be there sometimes but it's just...um...it's a hot neighborhood....really...it became hot after I moved there.
>
> **Dorothy:** And when you say "hot neighborhood" what do you mean?
>
> **Kara:** Like always police around.

Living in a community where one feels a sense of safety and protection is imperative to how

adolescent youth form and reshape their identity. Neighborhood conditions can place youth at-risk of leaving school, and can directly influences the type of social stressors and daily hassles that they will experience outside of the classroom. Kara highlighted the prevalence of shootouts and active police presence. She described how violence is a primary issue that shapes how one lives within a community (Wilkenson, 2003). Gang activity and crime both contribute to the degree of connection or fear that youth have within their neighborhood. Kara's comments underscore the role that neighborhood violence has on negative schooling outcomes (Daly et.al, 2009). Due to her living in a "hot neighborhood" she did not feel fully comfortable with staying at home. Instead Kara would only be there when violence in the neighborhood cooled down. This equated to her being a visitor in her own home as she would only frequent there. In this sense, having the option to go to another place acted as a buffer for Kara. She also mentioned the presence of police as a factor that shaped her neighborhood.

Police presence in low-income communities of color often occurs with police aggression, arrests, and surveillance (Schaible & Hughes, 2008). Kara's acknowledgement of police activity in her community did not surface as a source of protection to her. Rather, it contributed to a context that was one of hypervisibility by police and an unsettling home life. The physical presence of police brings not only sirens, but a policed nature of human activity that creates an environment of hyperawareness. Living in an area that she says is a "hot neighborhood" underscores the ways that environments shape the perspectives and experiences that youth have outside of the classroom but bring with them to school. These experiences are surreal and can mold the type of relationships and interactions that urban youth may have with adults and police in different places.

Mia also described the neighborhood context that she lived and where she raised her children.

> **Mia:** I used to live on Tyson Boulevard. Ummmm...it was all right. It was very ghetto, dangerous, a lot of shootouts every weekend. Too many parties, alot of fights, just too much drama.
>
> **Dorothy**: How did that make you feel to be there?
>
> **Mia**: At first it was kind of cool because like there was always things going off in the hood, but then now it was like...oh my God I'm gonna die. It's like now there are shootouts during the day at your house. Like where we lived at, our house got shot at because they were trying to get someone else chilling at our house so it was like whoa shoot! And then I have kids and I'd be damn if somebody shoots my kids trying to attack...I will attack them for them. That's how I feel about it. Let me fight. Oh! Oh! I don't wanna think of it {short laugh}.

Mia's community context made her question the safety of herself and her children. Research shows that youth who are exposed to acts of crime have higher probabilities of crime involvement and aggressive actions (Ceballo, 2000). In comparison to Mia, Kara expressed that she would try to avoid her neighborhood when there were shootouts. In Mia's case her exposure to acts of crime were not avoidable. The relationship that she had with peers that were over her house served to create a dangerous space that many people in different contexts would reserve as home. The dangerous spaces that surrounded her placed her family at-risk. If someone were to harm her family, she argued that she would try to fight back or attack anyone for her children. She believed that she could die in her neighborhood. This highlights the aggressive nature that she believed that she would have to engage in for her family's safety. Such negotiations of safe and dangerous spaces outside of school can make youth question multiple contexts as being potentially harmful, risky, or challenging their presence.

Moreover, not knowing what places are considered dangerous contexts in one's community will influence how students manage with community stressors on a daily basis.

Mia's comments point to the tangle of pathology that shapes an individual's psychological health and sense of well being (Harding, 2003) within an environment. Mia expressed concern for living in her neighborhood with the social network that she had access to. Her peers in the community were often involved in fights and what she calls "drama". The actions of peers and adults in her community defined not only how she felt about living within her own house, but influenced the behaviors that she believed she needed to employ to survive. Mia was in close proximity to the violence in her neighborhood as someone was shooting at her house. This created fear about her safety and that of her children. There was no escape from the streets at home. Compared to research by Wilkinson (2003) that found urban students in crime infested areas felt safe if they were in their homes, the students that I interviewed did not have that level of security. Their house did not provide for structural, physical, or emotional buffering from what was waiting outside. Like Mia and Kara, Jacob talked about violence in his neighborhood.

> **Dorothy**: If you had to describe your neighborhood what would you say?
>
> **Jacob**: I just moved where I'm living. It's not that bad...it's not as bad.
>
> **Dorothy**: And when you say bad what do you mean?
>
> **Jacob:** Just alot of police...you know? Gun shots...cause I was living on Upman...I was living on Upman first and on Upman I heard alot of gun shots and police going up and down...but now that I live on Mark's Corner...I don't really hear too much police over there... or I don't hear no gun shots either.

Jacob classified his old neighborhood in Upman as being "bad" due to the police presence

and hearing gunshots. His comments along with Mia and Kara underscore the levels of increased "risk of victimization or of witnessing violence" (Thompson & Massat, 2005, p.368) that youth in Roswell face. While Jacob was not homeless, he lived in an environment that he considered to be visibly and physically unsafe. After he moved to another community Jacob was able to escape the conditions that he associated with being "bad" that made his navigation outside of school more difficult. This allowed him to redefine his home and neighborhood as a new space. Youth that are unable to relocate and escape the violent conditions that plagued their neighborhood, it surfaces as a constant reminder of where they have to go home to. When I asked the students to describe their community Mia, Kara, and Jacob talked about violence being a major image that they encountered outside of school. These experiences served as more than distractions, but serious life events in which they could have fallen victim. For other students that lived in Roswell, violence was not a major concern. Rather, they encountered various negative influences and had to cope with role-strain. This made their lives and identities as students more challenging to negotiate.

In addition to issues of violence in Roswell, Carlos spoke about how bad neighborhood influences that impacted how he valued school.

> **Carlos**: There's like a whole bunch of bumbs around there…so like I see a lot of people feened out all the time...you like...just on the floor like. And then I see a whole bunch of people. I know that you are a little drunk and stuff...even try to fight me. So it's like…it like...I know you and you're drunk! So you know, I'm not gonna beat you up...yeah.
>
> **Carlos**: Like...people like hang out in front of buildings and like you know...who does that? They have nothing else better to do than like getting drunk and smoking in front of buildings and like...I really don't like that stuff. I don't know. I mean I got pulled into it you know? That's what..that's what led me to the path of getting arrested and umm...yeah man. I mean...I've never really liked it when I used to look at them, but then like...when that happened to me I realized like damn. I kinda used to do that stuff but I never really like noticed that to myself and umm...but I mean...my best friends

> you know, they come from the same neighborhood so umm...I guess it's like a good thing and bad thing kinda like around where I live.

Carlos said that his community context and everyday life walking from the train after school reminded him that he was in an environment that he did not want to live. Carlos outlined the visible and ever-present images of his neighborhood seeing people feened out and drunk. He says that he would keep himself on guard as on his way home he would have to defend himself from bumbs on the street. Students that live in communities of crime and violence encounter at-risk factors going to school and coming home. How they deal with these type of interactions impacts whether they block-out these lucid illustrations of how they should behave and what life will amount to in the future. At first Carlos questioned the behavior of people around him and did not want them to be near his building. He talks about his struggle to isolate himself from these negative influences, but he eventually got pulled into the culture of his neighborhood. Students that are unable to detach themselves from their community may try to fit-in as a way to feel a part of their social network. He says that he did not notice how his behavior changed in negative ways to resemble that of his neighborhood. It became second nature for him although it was not fully transparent to Carlos. Instead, Carlos made a subtle transition to a new set of values and beliefs that latched onto his identity.

Devon and Mia talked about peers that lived in their neighborhood that had left school.

> **Devon:** Most left school because most of them ended up having kids and like....yeah...or other things like...like...I don't know...like most of them just ended up having problems at home and ahh...yeah...they just like dropped...felt like school was just...like something that in life was just wasted...like a waste of time...like I just got to get this out the way so that I can handle my other business in...yeah.
>
> **Mia**: Everybody that I knew my neighborhood always came to me...Oh! I dropped out of school. They're making money off the street so there was really no role model...if

> anything they'll pull you down with them. And like that neighborhood that was just not the neighborhood to live in unless you the same...unless you're about that.

Devon and Mia point out the impact that peers can have on students leaving school within their neighborhood context. The friends that adolescents have within and outside of school are significant to how they come to value an education. Devon argues that many of his friends left due to having kids and not being engaged in school. Mia explained that her friends encouraged her to leave school as they were making money on the streets. Mia was exposed to and continually informed by her peers of the advantages of leaving school. If students do not have any counternarratives about the penalties of early school withdrawal, someone else's voices may be the only ones that they hear and that matter. Mia contends that the lack of role models in the community allowed her peers to perpetuate their behavior and belief system about school. The peer relationships that youth have in their community influence the type of belief system and motivations that students will come to know. Mia's and Carlos' comments illustrate the collective socialization perspective where:

> "norms, values, aspirations, and ultimately the behaviors of adolescents are shaped by their interaction with non-parental adults in their neighborhood. According to the socialization perspective, adult neighbors provide important models of behavior for local adolescents so that youth living in neighborhoods in which many residents experience school failure, joblessness, poverty, and family instability, will themselves be less likely to complete school, gain employment, or forego early, non-marital childbearing" (Crowder & South, 2003, p.660).

The students talked about various ways that they were being socialized outside of school through scripted conversations and indirect association with adults and peers. Mia's assertion that there are a lack of role models in her neighborhood for youth results in them emphasizing the "crabs in a bucket syndrome" as individuals will pull each other down. Youth that do not

have positive peer or neighborhood support may engage in activities that they perceive to be more beneficial long-term. In *The Truly Disadvantaged Wilson* (1987) asserts that there is a concentration effect within low-income Black neighborhoods that determines how individuals come to value themselves. In this way, the neighborhood shapes and forms the individual within that context where poverty and racial segregation are concentrated. The loss of positive role models within the community has pushed the "emergence of a street culture that questions the value of formal education as a vehicle for social mobility" (Flores, 2002, p.73). Although Wilson examines Black communities, the students of color that reside in diverse economically disadvantaged urban neighborhoods have experienced a shortage of positive role models that can teach the next generation of students. Mia said that the neighborhood that she lived in was "bad" and only is acceptable to people who buy-in and support the cultural aspirations and expectations required to be there. The ways that students navigate these neighborhood influences will impact whether they make it to school safely or get deterred. How an individual defines the type of neighborhood that they reside in is manifested by "both objective indicators as well as the subjective feelings of the people who live there" (Ferguson, 2001, p. 105-106). Despite the bad neighborhood conditions that several of the students said that they encountered, a few students mentioned that they lived in "good", "nice" or "safe" neighborhoods.

Merissa and Bacari described their neighborhood.

> **Merissa**: I actually grew up in a really nice neighborhood...umm...its, my elementary school's across the street and it's not like in the suburbs ...it's right smack in the city. The section you know is really nice...calm...quiet. So I wasn't really exposed to like alot of the gang violence and alot of the like drugs, and early pregnancies that were experienced a few blocks away cause it was literally like that...like a 5 minute walk and you'd be like in the middle of the hood or something like...not the hood but a

more dangerous area. So it's like, my mom was kinda shielded me from that kinda stuff.

Bacari: All the kids in my family were the same way...so like...we...we get into our little stuff but we don't...when we do it, we don't get into trouble with the law...or...I get into trouble at school sometimes but I don't get into trouble with the law. I don't get into trouble to the point where I would get kicked out of school....mum...I talk back to my mom here and there but I'm not...it's like we're bad but not that bad. We're maturing so we don't have to go through all that stuff....but that's because of us, us being raised...you don't. But like if I could hang out in the streets all times of night, I probably wouldn't...cause that's too much one...and because I wasn't raised that way.

Merissa and Bacari said that their family context shielded them from engaging in part of the neighborhood and with peers that were considered "bad". For these students family protective factors helped to reduce the social stress that they experienced outside of school in their community. Neighborhood factors operate within a still smaller complex of the family. The students exhibited a clear awareness of the conditions that surrounded them and a way to navigate these areas. Merissa says that she was not exposed to parts of the community that had crime and violence but she was in close proximity. Having exposure to negative community influences does not require urban youth to actually live within these environments. Knowing what places to go to and to avoid also play a critical role in how out-of-school factors shape early school withdrawal. Although she lives on the parameter of these conditions, Merissa points to her level of understanding of what happens in these contexts. In Merissa's case these conditions could be more easily avoidable on a daily basis as they did not happen outside her front door. However, these at-risk factors were still within reach and could have influenced her identity at school and at home. She credits her mother whom shielded her from these factors that could have made her like her peers. Both students had

protective factors that reduced their interaction with certain parts of the neighborhood.

Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw (2008) defines protective factors as "characteristics of the child, family, and wider environment that reduce the negative effect of adversity on child outcomes" (p.888). The students' mothers served as protective factors for them as Merissa said that she was "shielded" from certain conditions. Likewise, Bacari mentioned his upbringing as a method for keeping him out of the streets at night. Later during the interview Merissa said that her neighbors impacted her out-of-school behavior.

> **Merissa**: Well, in my neighborhood, I have some nosey neighbors and if I'm like, if I'm doing something that they deemed to be inappropriate like hanging out with a friend who happens to be a boy or something and they'll go running to my mother's door, knock on the door and say hey! I saw your daughter doing this...this and this and they'll like tell a long story when all I was doing is walking down and talking.

Research indicates that adults in higher income neighborhoods have more individuals to be potential enforcers that are able to keep youth from participating in delinquent activities (Crowder & South, 2003). These protective factors helped to distance the students from negative events and reduce delinquent activity outside of school. Merissa also stated that her neighbors often watched what she was doing when her mother was not home. This "neighborhood watch" served as a protective factor against aspects that could have placed her more at-risk. JoQuan stated that his community was "pretty good" although it's known to be bad. He lived near certain areas that he tries to avoid.

> **JoQuan:** Well it's actually pretty good. Even though the neighborhood's a bad neighborhood...well at least it's known to be a bad neighborhood...even though it is...it's actually pretty good. We live umm...on the other side of it...nothing but like Asian people, no thugs or anything.
>
> **Dorothy**: So like the other part of town are there alot of gangs there?

> **JoQuan:** Alot more drug sales happening and things like that...and probably alot more gang violence...things like that. There's just no reason to be over there. There's no one really over there but everybody else.

JoQuan believed that he was exposed to gang violence and drugs, but was not actively involved in the more negative aspects of his broader community. Instead, he practiced avoidance of the "bad" part of town. Dance (2002) describes this knowledge as street smarts. Carter (2005) defines contends that "street smarts include knowing how to look someone in the eye, to avert one's gaze at the right moment, to avoid life-threatening fights and encounters, to defend oneself by fighting, and to navigate through dangerous gang territories" (p.79). Having street smarts can be just as important as having book smarts in one's neighborhood. These street smarts were also evident for female students of color including Merissa in how she navigated her community. Not being aware of how context influences the lives of students can result in hazardous consequences for the youth that I interviewed. Many of them expressed some knowledge of street smarts as they would avoid certain areas by navigating around those contexts. Although JoQuan lived in what he characterizes as the "good" part of his community, his world at home consisted of avoidance and distancing of himself from parts of his neighborhood.

Conclusion

The students encountered several out-of-school challenges that required them to serve as "students" in the classroom and "adults" at home. Having to manage these various responsibilities produced role-strain and role performance anxiety. These roles then became more challenging because they produced daily hassles and stressors in their lives. Many of the students were balancing work, parenting, and neighborhood conditions with the high school diploma. Despite being in a low-income community, some of the students

characterized their community as “good” and discussed ways that their parents and adult neighbors acted as protectors and were indirectly supervising their behavior. Such protective factors created a layer of covering for these students even though they lived in disadvantaged conditions. All of the students described their neighborhood in terms of violence and safety. The communities in which urban youth of color in Roswell live provided various at-risk and protective factors that influenced how they were able to get to school and go home every day. These conditions were classified as “good” and “bad” but both environments resulted in students leaving school and not obtaining a diploma. It was a combination of out-of-school factors and in-school experiences that created insurmountable barriers to their intrinsic motivation to attend school. For some students, they could escape their neighborhood when it became violent. While others, they were shielded from aspects that may have pulled them into a different direction. Still, the neighborhood environments that students of color come from can inform their beliefs about the value of a diploma and how their education may be considered dispensable.

CHAPTER SEVEN: IN-SCHOOL FACTORS AND EARLY SCHOOL WITHDRAWAL

"Some of the worst things happen in schools when you're there...during your school years. Don't you think? Some of the worst things that...in life...happen to you in school".
JoQuan, Roswell Student

"I was just always bored in class and you know…I had nothing to do".
Merissa, Roswell Student

Introduction

Schools are institutions where youth learn how to form relationships with various individuals including with students, teachers, and administrators on a daily basis. Urban students of color that leave high school prior to graduation have a unique educational experience that requires them to actively negotiate their identities with their peer associations in school. Researchers have indicated several risk factors related to early school withdrawal including: living in an urban area, school policy, academic engagement, suspension and/or expulsion, transition to high school, and teacher relationships (Felice, 1981; Fine, 1991; Rumberger, 2011; White & Donald, 2010). A school's social structure has a significant impact on how urban youth come to understand a core set of values, orientations, and beliefs about the intrinsic value of education in their lives. Their conceptions of a high school diploma as disposable or a vital necessity develops in part from the type of experiences that they have in the classroom. Schools act as gatekeepers to graduation where "to maintain a more orderly environment and to promote conditions that contribute to higher standardized test scores, many schools systematically exclude and discharge troublemakers and lower performing students" (Davis et. al, p. 182, 2004). Deficit-oriented thinking by school staff can create toxic environments for students of color in school. Black and Hispanic youth that

attend schools that are stitched together by underachievement will negatively affect their ability to navigate the classroom. Whether they then internationalize these cultural and behavioral expectations that are ascribed to them impacts their disengagement and ultimately disconnection from the classroom.

Urban students of color encounter various at-risk conditions that ultimately "pull" or "push" them out of school. In comparison to being "pushed" out, "pullout" factors occur in out-of-school contexts and include the family, neighborhood, and other societal domains. Pushout factors are schooling conditions that coerce early student withdrawal by eroding the legitimacy of urban students of color through subtle and direct forms of exclusion. Tuck (2011) asserts that students are pushed out or "pressured to leave school by people or factors inside school, such as disrespectful treatment from teachers and other school personnel, violence among students, arbitrary school rules, and the institutional pressures of high-stakes testing" (p.818). These factors can serve as educational barriers for urban students of color by directly impacting their sense of belonging and interpersonal relationships that they develop with peers in the classroom.

The school context shapes the type of daily interactions that urban youth of color have with teachers, administrators, and school staff. Fine (1991) argues that students can be pushed out or have a coercive discharge that forces them to leave. For some students, they may believe that leaving is a better alternative for themselves and for the school. However, not all students that are pushed out physically leave school immediately. There are multiple measures used to encourage their withdrawal, and being pushed out becomes the end result of a long process of their removal. Schools serve as spaces that can foster or prohibit academic achievement (Christle et.al, 2007), and play a critical role in who graduates high school. It is

an institution that defines what behaviors and cultural practices are deemed normal, appropriate, and systematically validates what it means to be a "good" student. Youth that are presumed as gracing or permeating established school boundaries are often carted to a revolving door for their exit. Urban students of color disciplined under such practices and policies results in a dehumanizing schooling experience that is manifested in the classroom and in its corridors. Getting a high school diploma then becomes more contentious and isolating with minimal intrinsic gain.

In this chapter, I examine in-school factors that contributed to why many of the students that I interviewed had to leave the diploma behind. School did not serve as an environment for them to gain knowledge and develop as adolescents, but was an educational battlefield where they felt disconnected, violated, disrespected, and just like a number. The classroom was a space for school staff to purposefully craft punitive consequences for their behaviors, and followed many of the students throughout school. Several of them believed that school staff justified their abuse of authority and inaction though school policies and practices. Other students that I interviewed were negatively influenced by peer groups in school that devalued a diploma. First, I use cultural capital and Social Exclusion Theory to describe how peer culture served to socially exclude youth. I highlight the ways that feeling socially excluded acted as a mechanism for marginalizing and alienating students from their initial completion of a diploma. Second, I argue that how adults are positioned as authority figures in school impacts how they will interpret the behavioral acts of students of color, and the degree of interpersonal relationships that they will develop. The students outlined how they felt socially rejected at school, in its hallways, and classrooms on a daily basis. The treatment that they received from adults and peers made them question their existence in an

institution that treated them like they were powerless and ultimately did not belong.

Cultural Capital in Schools

Urban youth come to school with a diverse set of background experiences and cultural repertories that influence how they engage with educators in the classroom. Bourdieu (1990) defines cultural capital and its relationship to social class as the "ability to act 'cultured' by embodying the language, accents, and mannerisms of elites" (p. 278). It is the capacity to mimic dominant cultural norms, and to perform them as though they were individuals' own. Carter (2003) argues that cultural capital is created and preserved in schools as a method for reproducing a social hierarchical class based system by fostering the dominant group's cultural routines and ways of knowing. Urban students of color at-risk of not graduating high school have to navigate incongruent cultural expectations in various social settings that are often defined by peer groups at school. Cultural capital is fluid and malleable in different contexts and is apparent where there is a struggle for power and validation (Carter, 2003). Cultural capital is defined by "physical vectors, such as the characteristics of urban space, and by collective constructions such as social class, race, and gender" (Kelly, p.89, 2009). Specifically, assessment of the intersection of race and gender in determining whose culture has the most valued capital as determined by one's peers is integral to how urban youth of color experience school. Research by Carter (2003) illuminates the role of race in shaping the type of cultural capital that students acquire from home and school. To understand the intersection of race and gender with cultural capital in education "one needs to look at the context in which the capital is situated, the efforts by individuals to activate their capital, the skill with which individuals activate their capital, and the institutional response to the activation" (Laureau, p.38, 1992) in schools. Urban youth of color that leave school are

situated within context that is often alienating and disvalues their presence in the classroom. Using cultural capital as a form of social inclusion or exclusion from peers is vital to understanding why students leave school or are pushed out through its doors.

Social Exclusion Theory

Feeling excluded in school can led to several negative outcomes for urban youth including emotional isolation, lack of peer friendships, and academic alienation. Researchers have examined the role of cultural capital in shaping the academic performance of Black and Hispanic students (Carter, 2000; Muhammad, 2010; Zambrana, 2002). Bourdieu's (1977) concept of cultural capital can be used to understand the role of social exclusion in why Black and Hispanic children leave school. Social Exclusion "is a process of social selection that is based on a previously determined set of cultural criteria and is exercised by people with the high levels of income, education, and occupational prestige" (Bryson, p.885, 1996). Individuals may experience social exclusion due to how dominant groups define cultural standards for what should be valued in society. However, social exclusion is not a single act or an event that takes place. It is a "multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined" (Reay & Lucey, p.35, 2004). Schools are social institutions that operate as mediums for inclusion and exclusion. Urban youth of color are compared to a cultural criterion that promotes their isolation while framing their social incongruence as cultural mismatches between students with educators. This approach proclaims that students are not culturally compatible with schools, and relinquishes accountability to in-school factors that encourage early school withdrawal.

Viet-Wilson (1998) argues that there are two ways that researchers examine social exclusion: weak and a more robust analysis. Weak forms of social exclusion assert that "the

solutions lie in altering those excluded peoples' handicapping characteristics and enhancing their integration into dominant society" (p.45). Therefore, the individual should be changed or assimilated so that they fit within the norms, and values that are deemed appropriate by the dominant group. This underscores the rationale that urban youth of color should acquire the cultural capital, behavioral traits, and demeanors that are welcomed, legitimized, and support middle-class expectations in the classroom. In comparison to weak rationales, this study uses a stronger analysis of social exclusion. I highlight "the role of those doing the excluding rather than seeing the problem as located in the socially excluded" (Reay & Lucey, p. 36, 2004). Urban students that leave school are in a vulnerable position, because they are often viewed by educators as failing to abide by school rules and regulations. This approach negates the counternarratives of urban youth by limiting examination of how students themselves are victimized and wounded academically by adults at school. How urban youth of color describe and experience validation or dismissal in the classroom and within its corridors, accentuates the role that formal and informal practices and policies have in depicting schools as unsafe learning spaces for at-risk youth.

Fitting In or Standing Out: Peer Cultural Capital

The transition to high school is a critical process in adolescence (Cohen, 2009). Researchers assert that the transition to middle school and high school is important in how students will perform in the classroom (Sheets et. al, 1997; Andrews & Bishop, 2012). This period is marked by the formation of new peer relationships, adoption to new surroundings, as well as cognitive and psychological changes. There are significant events that take place in the lives students that if negotiated unsuccessfully can increase early school withdrawal (Neild et.al, 2008). The transitional process from elementary school to high school has been

described as a “puzzling terrain to traverse” (Andrews & Bishop, 2012), because students are entering into a new socialization period and are faced with various academic obstacles. Their mitigation of these challenges is vital to whether they remain in school or choose to leave. Moreover, their navigation of the hidden messages and cultural expectations that schools institutionalize will influence whether they become disconnected and lost in the transition. Entering into high school has been described as a period of alienation, detachment, and seclusion (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). This period of adjustment has been described as a “traumatic passage” (Lys, 2009) for Hispanic youth. For Black students that are labeled come from at-risk environments they are more susceptible to encounter problems during school transitions (Gentile-Genitty, 2009). Balancing academic requirements with the need for acceptance from peers and school staff can be challenging for adolescents. Urban youth lacking supportive services during this adjustment period may emotionally disengage and simply disappear. Their ability to manage and negotiate peer relationships will directly impact their level of engagement and academic performance while in the classroom.

Peer Exclusion at School

The individuals that I interviewed outlined how their maladjustment to the structure, culture, and expectations of school influenced their decision to leave. Several students expressed discontentment as they attended a new school and stated “I felt alone”, “I never choose to go”, “I just felt like being a new person”, or “I was too young”. Many of the students had difficulty adjusting to schooling expectations that were defined by their peers, and they questioned their ability to be academically successful. The students describe how they felt lost in their transition to various schools in Roswell. Moreover, they explain the role that their feelings of isolation and underperformance played in how they viewed themselves

as outsiders instead of students. Bacari described his interactions with peers in the classroom.

> **Bacari**: Freshman year...I was like...a freshman. Immature coming out from middle school and then I ...I barely got through that year of high school, cause I couldn't cope with it. And so sophomore year, that's when I matured a whole bunch. I just got tired of kids. I got tired of high school. I just got tired of drama with all the other kids. I was sitting in class like...why am I even here for? These little kids...bothering me. But yeah, I get annoyed fast. I guess that's when I started changing and just stopped trying…going to sleep in class.

Bacari asserts that after his transition from middle school to high school he had difficulty adjusting to different behavioral norms in the classroom. This continued over a two year period as he struggled to handle daily routines at school. He expresses uncertainty in his ability to navigate interpersonal relationships with his peers, and began to question his presence in the classroom. His comments illustrate the internal negotiation that urban youth of color contemplate in the long-term process of disengagement from school. If there is a lack of connection between students and their peers, this can produce personal doubt and isolation during critical adolescent transitions. Bacari describes how he experienced a mismatch (Ryan et. al, 2013) during his movement to a new schooling context. Youth experience mismatch when there is incongruence between their norms and beliefs with other individuals or institutions. Bacari choose to self-exclude himself from his peers to preserve his "mature status" is indicative of the degree of isolation and disconnection that he experienced. Students may struggle with having to balance classroom norms that are often defined, depicted, and negotiated by teachers and peers. Bacari's decision to not participate in class was an outward demonstration to his teachers and other students that he felt out of place.

Later during the interview, Bacari described his sophomore year in high school.

> **Bacari**: I know that I matured faster than them, but also I was one of the people who was in there and not being mature sometimes and making funny jokes. But I knew

> when to stop and they just didn't. And I would just sit in class, and I would just look up and see everyone interacting and I would just think...I don't belong here {laughs} ..I felt alone...like I didn't belong here with all these kids. And I was like...and then I got kicked out once...so I was supposed to be a senior now...and I got kicked out. And so that was always in the back of my head...like...I should be a senior now. I shouldn't even be here with all these kids. And like, I guess....you know...I kept reminding myself that all the time, and then I just started to feel that way. And then...I didn't wanna go back.

The inward rejection that Bacari felt from peers was displayed through his outward resistance to engage in the classroom, and in his subsequent decision to leave school. Although he would attempt to engage with his peers through informal interactions, he asserts that there are limitations on how one should behave at school. Bacari's decision to self-exclude was a means for safeguarding himself. Bacari says that he felt alone and expresses the penalties of not socializing with student peer groups. His comments underscore how having a "sense of belonging and identification with school are critical to protect students from disengagement and alienation that may ultimately lead to school dropout" (Espinoza, p.1, 2012). Being previously expelled from school also impacted why he felt socially excluded, because he was over age for his grade. He expresses remorse in getting kicked out of school, and reminds himself of how his behavior created long-term academic consequences. Bacari's expulsion coupled with his feelings of exclusion made the decision of being in school filled with regret and disappointment. Being in the classroom reminded him of his mistakes, and he started to feel like one. Bacari did not want to be in a place that would resurface negative memories. He decided that he did not need to be at school, and did not want to go back.

Similar to Bacari, Carlos explained how he felt about being in school.

Carlos: I used to really like school and umm... {pause} then... I got switched like and

like...the transition from school like really umm...messed me up…and then umm...that was in like elementary school.

Dorothy: Talk about that a little bit more.

Carlos: I used to do extra homework. Like that's how much I used to love school. And I used to get all A's and everything. And then I went to ahh… this school down the street. When I went there I wore like a nice collar shirt and everything. When I went up there everybody was wearing like regular clothes. It was like more of a…not really like a freer school, but like the teachers didn't pay that much attention to the students. So there would be like more swearing and all this and being like exposed to that. And I was the most proper kid there. And then they would always be like, why are you writing in

cursive and I'm like...you know…that's what I'm like used to, and then I just started writing sloppy {laugh}.

Dorothy: Was there a point after that that you would say that you didn't like school?

Carlos: The year after that. I started like…I don't know. I started swearing more. I would like actually…actually be like against the teacher. Like they would be like....don't
do this...and I would be like no! And umm...like…I don't know like…I just felt like....I
was like..I don't know. I just felt like being a bad kid in 5th grade. Like after 4th grade
just all through that change… I just felt like being a new person. And that's when I started trying to wear baggy clothes and all that stuff ...yeah...

Carlos had a difficult time adjusting to the cultural norms and expectations of two different elementary schools. Although Carlos mentioned that he loved school and was a high achiever in 4th grade, he began to discard his student identity for one that was more respected in a different context. School transitions can cause students to question traditional notions of academic success that are being reconstructed in a new schooling environment. Transitioning to another school can be difficult for youth that are adjusting to peer culture, customs for inclusion, and ways of being a "student". Carlos points out how dress was a mechanism for garnering acceptance at school. Peers play a vital role in students' adjustment to the

classroom and can "serve as models for adolescence in how to meet new social and academic responsibilities associated with the school transition" (Newman et. al, p.339, 2000). Carlos makes a distinction in how appearance was used a cultural signifier of who belonged in school by his peers. He suggests that students were wearing "regular clothes" to highlight how his collar shirt was a symbolic marker that made him feel that he did not fit in. He felt like an outsider at his new school, and to escape potential rejection from his peers he choose to adapt to the cultural norms and expectations that other students had defined for him. Carlos underscores the role that appearance plays in peer group acceptance.

In contrast to Bacari, who used self-exclusion as a means of preservation, Carlos described how he ascribed to the standards for inclusion of his peer culture. For Carlos, it presented more external rewards that he then learned to value. He suggests that he "just felt like being a new person", but characterizes this choice as turning him into a bad student. Although Bacari opted not to buy-in to peer expectations for behavior, Carlos believed that personal exclusion posed more severe risks. He began to adapt negative orientations toward school, and would oppose his teacher instead of remaining silent and invisible in the classroom like Bacari. His perception that teachers paid limited attention to students, their verbal cues, and attitudinal beliefs influenced his adaptation and transition to a new school.

Mia discussed how she felt as a freshman in high school.

> **Mia**: When I was in the 9th grade umm…I was a freshmen. I was too young and I got easily mentally into doing things in high school…like actually that was what changed me.
>
> **Dorothy**: Change you in a bad way?
>
> **Mia**: Uh huh. It was just like there was not a lot of restrictions…too much leeway.

Mia said that she had a difficult time as a freshman because she transferred to several

schools as she started her secondary education. During the interview, she stated that she had transferred to four different high schools. A lack of structural support in the transition from middle school to 9th grade led to Mia transferring to several different schools. School mobility can play a critical role in the process of disengagement, because urban students may have a limited social network that encourages graduation. Mia recognizes that she was impressionable during her freshman year and believes that she was easily manipulated by her peers. This caused Mia to struggle academically as she attempted to form her own identity as a student. Students enter into high school they are "exploring multiple identities and weighing options about who they are and who they hope to become" (Benner & Graham, p. 356, 2009). Mia states that she was "too young" and was easily influenced and followed the direction of her peers. High school presented a new found freedom to Mia that she was unable to effectively maneuver. Students garner more independence during the ninth grade transition, and that level of autonomy can produce various academic consequences (Neild, et. al, 2008). For Mia, autonomy coupled with minimal restrictions at school served to be an academic detour. Like Mia, Gabriella talked about her freshman year.

> **Gabriella**: It's funny because 9th grade…I felt like I had to fit in so I had... no I had to say starting in middle school. And then by 9th grade it changed for me. Because in middle school, I felt like I had to dress a certain way for boys or girls to talk to me.
>
> **Dorothy**: Yeah.
>
> **Gabriella:** I was still trying to figure myself out so I was a follower. So I'm like oh she's wearing tight pants and little boots…I'm going to do that. Or, if that's how you get a guy's attention…I'm going to do that. But I've never done anything with them, but I've thought to get a guy to like me I had to do that.
>
> **Dorothy:** Yeah.
>
> **Gabriella:** Close to 9th grade I was just like…that's not me though. I'm following girls and they're not getting respect.

Gabriella illustrates how the transition to high school is not only a process of identity construction but is gendered for urban adolescent females of color. She expresses a personal necessity to fit in with the crowd by assuming and performing her perceived role of females in school. Still, her attempt to be physically pleasing to her peer group and to blend in with these perceived cultural norms and behavioral expectations for girls demonstrates how some students lose one identity and swap out another. Gabriella says that she became a follower, because she was figuring out who she was and conversely who she was not. Adolescent identity development is a process that requires internal bargaining and peer navigation for all students, but in particular for female urban youth of color. Her comments indicate how school transitions are not only gendered, but are complex in nature as they often force students to assume identities that are incompatible to one's own beliefs and orientations. She points out her direct attempts to solicit the attention of male students, but distinguishes between doing something with guys and getting them to like her. This difference is imperative as Gabriella discusses how gendered boundaries are created for some students, but the role that peer noncompliance has on female urban students' sense of belonging at school. Karina discussed her high school transition.

> **Karina:** I never chose to go to Williams High from the get. They had me as a 10th grader and I was supposed to be in 11th grade and I ain't having that. I was in DCF custody at the time. So I told DCF…if yall don't get me out of here, I'm dropping out. So I gave them the threat of dropping out. I wasn't gonna dropout but you know, threw the threat at them. And I said, if yall don't get me out of here I'ma dropout so...I told them look into some schools. I was like you know what, just pick another school...and they said it goes by your IEP. So I'm like you know what? I never chose to go there.

Karina described how she never chose to attend Williams High. She was frustrated with having to register at another high school, because it impacted the number of course credits

that she could transfer. Karina openly expressed dissatisfaction with having to be classified as a 10 th grader although she would be an 11th grader at her old school. Despite DCF attempts to enroll her in a new school in Roswell, Karina highlights her discontentment with how and who chose where she would attend school. Klem & Connell (2004) asserts that there is a necessity for students to have autonomy support which allows them be primary decision makers in school. Karina perceived that her voice was not only negated from dialogue but demonstrated the lack of care and respect that she desired during her school selection process. Karina illustrates the impact that school choice, and in particular, the lack of student voice in high school selection plays in how students transition into new academic surroundings.

Students that are placed in schools that are less desirable and that they perceive as potentially damaging to their educational pursuits can prove to be costly for students long-term. Karina uses avoidance as a method for preserving her voice. By threatening DCF with "dropping out" of school she is attempting to reclaim her voice in choosing where she would attend, and to exhibit her frustration with her new school assignment. Karina points out during the interview that her placement was influenced by her IEP. Karina's IEP was used as a marker of what schools she could attend and the type of academic preparation that she would receive. The use of her IEP by DCF and Roswell Public Schools served to place her in a box that limited her choice in where she could attend school. A lack declaration in choosing the high school that she would register during her 11th grade year not only impacted Karina's perception of inclusion in school, but forced her to use "dropping out" as a potential escape plan.

Navigating Adult Figures at School

The relationships that urban youth of color have with teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators impacts how they will perform academically in the classroom. The social context of schools including the type of formal and informal relationships that students have with educators has various implications for youth that are placed at-risk. Having negative relationships with school staff is a core reason associated with why students leave school (Davis, 2004). Urban youth that have unconstructive and academically harmful verbal transactions with school personnel are placed in precarious contexts that are ultimately destructive to their educational success. Murry & Zvoch (2010) argues that there is a "distancing" that adolescents experience with adults as they navigate difficult social systems in-school and out-of-school contexts. Schools are institutions where adolescents learn how to construct, negotiate, and discard peer and adult based relationships. Faulty navigation of these relationships not only can condition urban students of color for academic failure, can make returning to school to less desirable.

There are multiple relationships that urban students of color negotiate with adult figures at school can illustrate why leaving school may be the most viable alternative. These include managing teacher-student relationships, interactions with guidance counselors, and school administrators. Students that experience teacher induced isolation in the classroom often form negative relationships with educators, and are discouraged from having positive interactions with future teachers (McHugh et.al, 2013). How teachers perceive of urban youth of color and use their perceptions to develop stereotypical connotations will influence how they communicate and education them. Just as "teachers cannot educate students in whom they have no confidence, students cannot learn from teachers in whom they have no trust"

(Davis, p. 183, 2004). The teacher is often the authoritarian figure as well as enforcer, policy interpreter, implementer, and boundary setter in the classroom. Still, educators work within a larger social institution in collaboration and often opposition of administrators, guidance counselors, and school staff.

Guidance counselors play a key role in shaping whether urban students of color reach are graduating high school or transitioning to college. There are multiple interacting and completing functions that guidance counselors have that require them to serve as personal advisors, supports, psychologists, and mentors (Butler, 2003). There is a plethora of literature that examines the role of school counselors in supporting student academic development (Clark & Breman, 2009; Kendrick et.al, 1994; Mitcham et. al, 2009). Consequently, there is limited consideration to the role guidance counselor's play in urban students of color early school withdrawal (Dockery, 2012; Fine, 1983; Scheel et. al 2009). Examining the social context of schools and how individuals develop positive relationships or promote dissonance with urban youth is instrumental to understanding why many students leave school. In-school factors not only configure the worlds that urban students are educated, but can mask their potential and capability to reach graduation.

Rodriguez (2008) argues that incorporating student narratives on their experiences in school are critical to uncovering "intricacies involved in relationships, precisely because they are asymmetrically positioned to adults in the school context" (p.438). Examining student-teacher and guidance counselor relationships within the social context that it occurs --in schools can reveal how distrust, accommodation, and exclusion is produced and manifested by power dynamics in the classroom. In this section, I discuss how negative adults relationships in school impacted student's academic progression toward a diploma. This

included coercive practices and policies implemented by school staff. Many of the students experienced confrontations with teachers that were made public rather than private. Other students described how teacher authority and indifference were used to devalue students at school. These youth narratives underscore how they attempted to navigate various schooling contexts that were filled with verbal obstructions, educational deterrents, and pathways that ultimately directed them to dead end roads.

Lack of Authentic Caring

The student's ability to manage adult relationships at school was critical to how they interacted with teachers and with guidance counselors. Many of the students explained that their guidance counselors were rarely present and frequently absent or inaccessible. Many of the students perceived their guidance counselor to be useless bodies that provided no support or resources toward graduation. Others believed that they were positioned by schools to be gatekeepers. Taya described her relationship with her school counselor.

> **Dorothy**: Did you have a good relationship with your guidance counselor?
>
> **Taya**: No…cause the guidance counselor {laughs} didn't care.
>
> **Dorothy:** What do you mean?
>
> **Taya:** Like if I was going and say I was gonna dropout, they say they didn't care...just like that.
>
> **Dorothy:** Why do you think they were like that?
>
> **Taya**: Cause they were just probably there to get paid. Some of them just {laughs} don't care.

Taya believed that there was a lack of caring from adults at school, specifically from her assigned guidance counselor. In Subtractive Schooling Valenzuela (1999) contends that a teacher's beliefs and orientations are instrumental to the concept of caring. Caring can be

authentic or aesthetic and are these notions "are rooted in fundamentally different cultural and class-based expectations about the nature of schooling" (Gonzalez & De Jesus, 2006, p. 412). For Taya school was a place where caring became a luxury and indifference was the norm. Having non-existent relationships with adults in school can be just as punitive for students that feel socially excluded. She believed that school was an environment for individuals who are positioned as adults to simply get a paycheck rather than having an authentic relationship with students. The interactions that she had with her school counselors demonstrated to Taya that she was situated in a schooling context that devalued her as a student. Youth that have pre-existing fragile relationships with adults may continue to question who they are as students in the classroom. Darri also described her relationship with her guidance counselor.

> **Dorothy**: Do you have good relationship with your guidance counselor at your school?
>
> **Darri:** Not really.
>
> **Dorothy**: Why do you think that you didn't have a good relationship with them?
>
> **Darri:** Because I think that she didn't understand me…and she didn't know me so…there wasn't no connection between us.

Darri did not have a good relationship with her guidance counselor in high school because there was a lack of connection. Although school counselors play a critical role in the transitional process of students to graduation and to college, students that are disconnected or lack formal bonds with staff can lead them down another path that does not include the diploma. Bryk &Schneider (2003) contend that "distinct role relationships characterize the social exchanges of schooling" (p.41). The type of social exchanges that students of color have with school staff is critical to their academic achievement, because it can serve as a buffer or risk factor for youth that are considering early school withdrawal. Darri also argues

that her guidance counselor failed to understand her as a person. By not having a connection with students, the impact of school counselors can be minimal. Darri suggests that it was difficult for her to establish a relationship with an individual that she barely knew. Additionally, she believed that her school counselor had no interest in her academic welfare. Despite having an assigned counselor, Darri expresses that they served little purpose for her at school. Rasheed described his relationship with a guidance counselor.

> **Rasheed:** Like my guidance counselor …she told me umm…{pause} you shouldn't even try.
>
> **Dorothy:** She told you that?
>
> **Rasheed:** And I'm not even a rare case. So it's like I've seen students where she's like, said you should just go to a two year school…play it safe. And I'm like…what? Or you're not good enough to get into a school.

Rasheed says that the type of verbal exchanges that he had with his counselor was unproductive, and he asserts that his case is not atypical. Instead of encouraging his peers to attend a four year university, he suggests that the guidance counselor would state that students should apply to a community college. However, by deterring students to safe schools, the messages that students receive about the long-term value of an education may be taken as being counterproductive.

There is a lack of *authentic caring* that Rasheed experienced from adults at school. Authentic caring places students needs in the forefront and the "material, physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of youth guide the educational process" (Valenzuela, 1999, p.110). Rasheed argues that his schooling aspirations were being railed by his counselor and that he was not being guided through the educational process that is available to other youth. Additionally, Rasheed expresses discontentment with the lack of support that he receives.

This idea of playing it safe can result in negative inputs and outcomes for urban youth that are contemplating whether to stay in school. Rasheed's comments illustrate the role that private dialogues with school staff have on how youth develop schooling expectations and the impact on their future career paths. Rasheed continues to make a few additional comments about his school counselor.

> **Dorothy:** Why do you think guidance counselors use that as a measure?
>
> **Rasheed:** Because that's what you know…that's what they build it off of. It's like you know, they look at that and it's like…oh, this student tired in school. This student tries in school. Me, I could be…I can be in school every single day...busting my butt…getting B+'s because I just don't get it…and…I get overlooked you know? I fall through cracks…and that's the biggest things that happen in high schools…in Roswell Public Schools specifically…kids fall through cracks you…know? Like…you see suburban schools…and kids don't fall through cracks.

Rasheed makes a distinction between students that guidance counselors overlook and those that are perceived to be of more value. He argues that grades are an important indicator of academic engagement in school. Grades hold a critical value in how school staff interact with students, and the level of attention that they are then given. Rasheed believes that students who perform well academically are labeled as putting forth the needed effort to be successful or that they have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. However, such notions negate that some "individuals come to school with no laces for their boots or no boots at all (Carter, 2008, p.467). Carter (2008) asserts that "the mainstream achievement ideology fails to account for structural conditions that might constrain or even impede students' abilities to achieve their maximum potentials in school and life" (p. 467). Failure to identify how school and societal barriers shape academic achievement simply provides a fragmented depiction of students of color in the classroom. Rasheed's comments illustrates how the use of merit to define achievement acts as a sorter and as a method for exclusion. He suggests that students

that have comparable academic performance in urban schools are in worst positions than youth in suburban schools. Rasheed states that students in suburban schools do not fall through the cracks. However, he does not suggest that the cracks in suburban schools are not visible. Gabriella expressed similar experiences with her guidance counselor.

> **Gabriella:** Like my guidance counselor is like look…if you don't get to go to college this fall, you know just think about you know relaxing. It's like look, you can say that, it's easy for you to say because guess what you have a career you want, you went through the high school process, you went through college, and now you're successful, you're married.
>
> **Dorothy:** Uh huh.
>
> **Gabriella:** I'm sorry if this is how you see it, but I see it differently. I actually want to be somebody.

When I interviewed Gabriella, she was upset that her school counselor would suggest relaxing as an alternative for her if she was not accepted to college. Gabriella asserts that following her counselor's suggestions would make her a nobody. Consequently, she distinguishes herself from students that would not attend a higher educational institution by commenting that she wanted to be somebody. Being a "nobody" to "somebody" is critical, because she believes that this a valued commodity for students that transition to college. This division is significant, because how students perceive of themselves and their educational trajectory is not only influenced by interactions with school staff, but by the relationships that youth may or may not have with their guidance counselor.

Many of the students described how their school counselor served little purpose in their path to obtaining a diploma. Rather than functioning as resources for students and additional support, they believed their counselors to be apathetic, absent, and oppositional. Despite the fact that a few of the students expressed interest in attending college, they argue

that their counselor suggested that they should “play it safe”, or to “relax” instead of pursuing an educational alternative that would led to more positive outcomes. In comparison to teachers would had negative relationships with students, it was the school counselor’s inaction that many of them believed was detrimental to their academic success, and subsequent transition to graduation.

Adult Interactions with Male Students of Color

Another major theme from the student interviews is that teachers see themselves as authoritarian, dictators, and that have the only and final say-so in the classroom. The classroom was not a shared context for teaching and learning, but was a space where students felt excluded. Rasheed described his interactions with adults at school.

> **Rasheed:** I was just constantly fighting…fighting with people...it’s like, not just students like, I was fighting the administration, faculty and stuff like that and it’s like, it gets really tiring cause at the end of the day I’m not gonna win that fight, I’m never gonna win that fight. even if I have facts that are a mile long....I’m never gonna win that fight. They’re never gonna take my side over someone with authority.
> **Rasheed:** Everybody got some value you know what I’m saying? Everybody has something to offer and she {teacher} didn’t like that. Pretty much cause she wants to be the only one who has something to offer.

Rasheed’s comments underscore how the schooling context is often highly contested as individuals attempt to gain power and control. Noguera (2003) argues that schools are often not a site for optimism and place to succeed for Black males but rather are spaces of rejection. Male students of color that feel excluded by adults may believe that they are ultimately on the losing end of a battle. Within the schooling context, having power and positioning dictates whose voice as merit and worth. Moreover, how students perceive and experience exclusion between various school actors. Rasheed makes a significant point when he says “I’m never gonna win”. The schooling context created insurmountable obstacles for

him that could not be mediated by the individuals that he believed with whom he was in battle. What Rasheed is experiencing at school is what Duncan (2002) refers to as *differend.* Duncan's (2002) study of Black male students suggests that disputes with school staff "are largely incommensurable, thus leaving intact structures of domination that cause those who are oppressed to continue suffering wrongs" (p.131). Rasheed felt socially excluded because he believed that his voice had limited currency with someone who was positioned with authority. Thus, the treatment that he received from adults at school remained unresolved. Rasheed is disheartened and expresses resentment for being a student within an institution that sees him as powerless while consequently welcoming the opinions of educators as valid. Excluding students for the sake of being the provider of knowledge rather than a co-constructor of it can be detrimental to youth that are contemplating whether to stay in school or to leave. Jacob discussed how teachers behave in the classroom.

> **Jacob:** Yeah...it's too much...it just umm....what's that word...authority? It's just too much authority. Teachers just wanna be in charge. Like, we already have parents. We get away from our parents. It's like we leave the house from our parents and then we go to school to some more parents. They don't make sense to us. Tryin to tell us how to do this...how to do that...like fix your clothes…do this like…you don't worry about my clothes. You worry about my school and my work. And umm...that's what teachers...they...they...always focus off of. They focus off of…that they're supposed to teach. That's all they are... a teacher. Nothing else ya know? But they wanna tell you how to wear your clothes and stuff, how to sit in the chair. Like me, I can sit like this but a teacher want me to sit in the chair all like that...that's not comfortable for me. I don't wanna sit like this ya know? I'm more comfortable like this. Now when they're telling me to sit like this…I feel like I'm not myself.

Similar to Rasheed, Jacob suggests that teachers utilize their authoritarian position in excess and in uninhibited ways. The two students also underscore how power dynamics between students and teachers are performed in schools, and the consequences of being treated as powerless and subordinate in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (2011) suggests that

there is a “love-hate” relationship that mainstream society has with Black males that extends outside of school. This is because “we seem to hate their dress, their language and their effect; we hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. While society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots; we seem less comfortable with them than in places like the National Honor Society” (Howard, 2013, p.55). Jacob outlines how educators overstep student defined boundaries, because teachers assume that their title rightfully secures them at the top of the hierarchical pyramid. Although he believes that going to school allows students to escape their parents, he highlights how teachers misinterpret and assume their role as teacher to be equivalent to that of a parent. In this way, educators use their institutionalized authority to overstep boundaries that students define and actively have to negotiate in the classroom.

Teachers often assume authority roles in school and use their positioning to obtain the rights associated with such status. Educators play a significant role in determining whether students are perceived as ascetically pleasing in the classroom. Students that are deemed to be non- compliant are singled out by teachers for immediate correction. However mechanisms that teachers use to correct how youth should be students can led to an invalidation of one’s sense of self. The verbal cues that his teacher defined and interpreted indicated that how he presented himself in the classroom was unacceptable and needed to be discarded.

Devon described an interaction that he had with a teacher.

> **Devon:** Like they go extra hard with the time and if you’re like a minute late…that’s the biggest problem I had like...I was trying so hard and like teachers be like...go so hard with it and its like…come on man! You gotta just understand where I’m coming from. Just like...let me in first. Let’s talk or something. It’s like if you’re a minute late…they’ll close the door in your face, and it’s like come on….that’s not school…that’s jail.

Dorothy: So you thought that school was like jail?

Devon: Oh yeah! Yeah…yeah…definitely! I definitely saw school as like jail. It looks like jail.

Dorothy: How does it look like jail?

Devon: Well...I be like looking at the tables and like…these are like jail cafeteria tables. And I'm like...dang! This looks just like jail too. I think they do design it like jail like…I don't know…kinda similar to school like...I think they do that on purpose. It can't be that serious with your students we're all just humans. Like everybody's gonna be like... people are gonna be late. People are gonna like...everybody's human like nobody's perfect and they don't understand that. It's like...it's sad and especially young kids…young kids are gonna be kids. You have to be lenient.

Dorothy: Are there any other ways that you say that school is like jail?

Devon: Oh yeah...like it's like...cause it's just so strict! Like.....teachers are like...like PO's like walking through the hallways like....come on man...just get to class and just do what you gotta do. Like...the doors...look at the doors are like...like...like one window...like a cell door. Like school is just like...I don't know like...I hate it!

Devon suggests that how he was treated by one of his teacher's was unjust and marginalizing. Livingston & Nahimana (2006) contend that Black youth in urban schools are more aware of adult beliefs and orientations toward them. His comments illustrate how time was an instrument for disciplining and punishing student behavior rather than as a tool for managing attendance. Punctuality acted as a mechanism for exclusion and for disciplining his behavior. He suggests that the structural arrangements of school and treatment that students receive are comparable to what individuals experience in jail. The comparative analysis that he makes that his teacher's management of student behavior in school is similar to jail is critical, because it demonstrates how the classroom socializes youth to perform and act out certain norms that may be counter to their academic development. How urban youth, and in particular, males of color navigate the hidden curriculum of school influences whether their path leads to graduation or to prison.

Researchers have examined the "school to prison pipeline" (Christie et al., 2005; Gonzalez, 2012; Wald & Losen, 2003) and the use of discipline policies (Reyes, 2006; Skiba et al., 2011; Villarruel & Dunbar, 2006) on students of color. Schools are spaces that can pre-expose male youth of color to prison by transporting them from the classroom to a jail cell. Devon describes several ways that his school resembled a penitentiary. He discusses how cafeteria tables reminded him of jail, and argues that schools intentionally create environments that make getting an education more of a sentence rather than a valuable incentive. It was not only how teachers treated him in the classroom but the actual schooling context. Additionally, Devon compares teachers to parole officers to highlight the authoritative presence that educators have in school. He says that teachers protrol the hallways and usher students to class. His comments demonstrate how power dynamics within school can be a breeding ground for exclusion, and how educators create environments that treat youth as corralled animals. He not only describes teachers as parole officers, but he illustrates how the hierarchical nature of teaching can create disciplinary problems in school. Moreover, how the policing, monitoring, and subjection of student behavior by adults can impact whether they are disengaged in the classroom.

Many of the students suggested that how teachers were positioned in school was significant, because it afforded them the luxury of using authority as a weapon for subjecting student behavior rather than as a way for managing it. The students discussed incidents where educators used their influence to abuse their power. This resulted in feelings of exclusion, isolation, and powerlessness. The volatile ways that educators interact and cohabitate with urban youth can create hostile contexts were school becomes jail. Moreover, their narratives illustrate how schools act as political spaces where power develops, is defined, and

manipulated by educators. The students also underscore the consequences of being treated as youth without voices.

Spotlighting in the Classroom

A significant theme from the student interviews is that they have negative interactions with teachers in the classroom. Their teachers served as antagonists who used their position to inflict bias practices and rules for governing their behavior. The students outlined how teachers often provoked confrontations while ridiculing and humiliating them in front of their peers. Many of the students believed that educators placed them on center stage to reinforce a classroom hierarchy where they were subordinate and powerless. Majority of the students that had classroom altercations with teachers were male students of color. This section explores how teachers would "spotlight" student behaviors in the classroom and influenced their desire to leave school. While, the students did not articulate how teachers' comments acted as "racial spotlighting" (Carter Andrews, 2012), they did express ways that they perceived it be microaggressions. Carter Andrews (2012) defines spotlighting to define "how Black students are positioned as racially hypervisible by whites when they do not seek to be" (p.122). In the study, Black youth were spotlighted or placed on center stage in the classroom by educators. The students that I interviewed discussed how they experienced spotlighting in the form of verbal exchanges and confrontations. Luis described an incident in class with one of his teachers.

> **Luis:** I'm not that type of kid who misbehaves. I'm very understanding. The only time I get an attitude with a teacher…if they treated me unfairly like. I understand if I got in trouble for something…I'm a grownup about it. I be like…alright I did that. But if you yell at me for something I didn't do…I will get loud at you. And I don't like when you like order me around. If I'm like standing up to go throw something away and you tell me to sit. I always feel like I'm not a dog! Just let me throw this away and I'll sit down. Like you're the one disturbing the class. Nobody's looking at

> me, I'm not making no jokes. Let me just throw this away…and I get annoyed by that because she's basically stopped the whole entire class to tell me to sit down and things like that.

Luis was not only aggravated by how one of his teachers treated him in the classroom, but he explains how he felt dehumanized and marginalized by the language his teacher used to speak to him in front of his peers. Luis believes that he behaves in class but that teachers often provoke certain behaviors from students. He says that he takes accountability for his behavior, and if he is causing trouble then he will admit to it. However, for students that are spotlighted in front of their peers they may seek alternative ways to defend themselves. Luis also contends that he disagrees with how teachers will order students around as though they are subordinate with limited freedom to move freely around the classroom-- even to go to the trashcan. Additionally, Luis underscores how educators use language as a means for alienating students by telling them to "sit" as though they are animals. He says that when teachers use certain verbal cues to interact with him, he feels like he is not a student but a dog. Educators that purposely point out student's behaviors and actions that they deem inappropriate may be perceived by youth as being threatening. Consequently, Luis argues that inequitable treatment by teachers warrants him to be on the defensive. Instead of him disturbing the class, he believed that the teacher by spotlighting him purposefully garners the attention of his peers, and causes more significant classroom distractions than he did otherwise. Similar to Luis, Jacob described his interactions with teachers.

> **Jacob:** Umm...it was just teachers...just teachers. Like...they were always right…and that's just…just...how it goes. And like even when I say something to a teacher I would say the same things they said, but they would like use bigger words...like trying to make me look stupid, like ya know? That's what...that's what I was going through middle school and then in high school it started to get worse. And I was just like…I ain't saying nothing… and like teachers have alot of attitude. Alot of them have alot of attitude...like they cant...it's like, why do you have the job that you have if you

can't like do it? You shouldn't do it.

Jacob: Like...like my nephew, his second day...his second day of school like the teacher called she called, and we're like alright...the second day she called it must be something wrong...like, either she's not used to him or she's just not good with her job, it's one of the other ya know? I don't know...only she knows you know? And I went up to the school to talk to her or whatever and she has an attitude problem.

Dorothy: The second day?

Jacob: Yeah, and it's like, you didn't give him a chance you didn't give him a week to see if he kept doing it...like if he kept doing it then it's a problem. But like, the second day? And that's how it was with me too, When I was going to school. One little thing and it was like...up! Gotta call your house...up! Get into trouble...get out of class....and it became to me like...{pause} alright...this is what this is supposed to be for me. I 'm supposed to be out of class and not in class…getting in trouble. And so I...I just turned into that. Like I was gettin' into that trouble...and I just turned into it.

Jacob asserts that his teachers made him feel voiceless in school and that they would ascribe him as a troublemaker persona. He argues that teachers have been humiliating him in class since he was in middle school. However, as he progressed to high school the spotlighting has become more intense. As a means of self-preservation and to save embarrassing interchanges, he would not participate in class. His opting out is a method that he used to feel more included. Consequently he excluding himself from class based interactions. Jacob says that teachers believed that they were "always right" and that treating students in this way was the standard practice. There was nothing that he could do about it. Although it is not clear whether the teacher's practices were well-intended, it is evident that Jacob perceived that he was pointed out in front of his peers in a confrontational way. He questions the role of teachers in educating students if they are ill-equipped to effectively work with youth. Jacob contends that teachers have an attitude when he tries to talk with them. Students that have confrontational exchanges with educators may question their attitudes toward teaching. Especially if it appears that they are unsatisfied with their career choice.

Additionally, he discusses an incident with his nephew and correlates that experience with how he has been treated in school. Jacob contends that some teachers are not good at their job and lack experience working with students. Instead, he believes that educators contact parents to correct student behavior rather than acknowledging that teachers themselves are often not able to adequately do their job. He compares his nephews experience with his own and cites that he would get into trouble in class over simple behavioral actions. This included him being removed from the classroom or calling home to speak with his parents regardless of whether parent intervention was even necessary. How Jacob was treated by teachers reinforced to him that he should be defiant rather than studious. Youth that accept negative notions of who they are by educators may subsequently isolate themselves from class discussions to avoid humiliation. Yet, this decision can result in students becoming socially disengaged and disorientated from their peers and adults.

Rasheed discussed a situation he had with a teacher in the classroom.

> **Rasheed:** So I did just start to walk out...you know? I don't really wanna argue with you and I started just…you know staying to myself. I started teaching myself different things to occupy my time just so I can keep my mind busy so I didn't have to focus on things like that you know? And part of that worked but at the same time, it never really escaped. You can't really escape it so. I would sit there and music would be on and it wouldn't even be my music but.... somehow my name would get called. Like...can you turn your music off ? And I'm like...alright…fine…you know? And it's just you can't really win that battle and so, when it really comes down to it, you can really see the hate. You can really see how some teachers just really do despise certain students.

Rasheed's comments highlight the consequences of using self isolation as a tool for navigating potential mistreatment from teachers. He was very passionate about how the classroom is crafted to be a hostile place by teachers who not only loathe certain students, but that purposefully single them out for actions that were not intentional. His initial response to

teacher confrontations was to walk out instead of engaging in verbal exchanges like Luis. Although leaving class was counterproductive, he believed that it was the primary strategy that he could use to navigate negative interactions with educators. Leaving class was a way to avoid arguments but also to survive. Similar to Jacob, when Rasheed was in class he began to isolate himself and remained invisible. However, Rasheed asserts that avoidance was an ineffective strategy because he could not escape. Similar to Ferguson's (2001) study of African American males, Rasheed illustrates how boys of color may detach and exclude themselves from educators. Rasheed was trying to escape the isolation that he felt from how teachers treated him in the classroom, but it resulted in a more intense self-segregation.

Additionally, Rasheed described an incident where he was publically identified in front of peers for actions that he did not commit but was found guilty by his teacher. Rasheed described how classrooms were battlefields. These battlefields had winners and losers. Rasheed expresses resentment in the fact that as a student he is unable to "win". Rasheed says that these battles do not result from students, but is rooted in the hate that teachers have for them. He believes that teachers despise certain students, and that hate is deeply ingrained in how they treat youth in the classroom. Rasheed then made a few additional comments about how he was treated by one of his teachers.

> **Rasheed:** She's like...you can't come here anymore {to class} and now it's like, now it becomes a...now it's territorial you know what I'm saying? You don't want anyone walking in where you...you know pretty much, where you…that's…that's pretty much your stopping ground. You know? So I realized why even argue with her you can never win.
>
> **Rasheed:** If you see how really talented I am and you know this…and for just that purpose you keep me from every opportunity possible, you…you become...not only do I become spiteful she becomes alot more...like... she becomes bitter. Like you just become bitter you know what I'm saying? Then you go home and you figure out how can I make this kids life miserable. And I don't really know if people actually do that

because…I feel like...I feel like...because I honestly go home and I think like...what is she thinking sometimes?

Rasheed suggests that the classroom is a warzone where teachers have home field advantage. Students have to navigate classroom boundaries that educators develop, manipulate, and freely create and destroy. Rasheed asserts that educators use methods to preserve boundaries in non- transparent ways, and that are subjective and discriminatory. He highlights how teachers use authority to restrict the type of students that they let enter and exit the classroom. He states the classroom is a teacher's stopping ground and as such, students can become trespassers within the spaces of school. In this way, the classroom is limited to students that teachers desire to be there. Rasheed did not feel that he was a student that was valued in class. Instead, he believed that his teacher would see how talented he was but would hinder him from obtaining opportunities in the classroom and at school. Rasheed suggests that teachers who overlook his talent cause him to be spiteful. Not only is Rasheed feeling unwanted in the classroom, but he develops an overtly negative relationship with teachers. In return, he argues that teachers become bitter and reinforce practices that marginalize him in the classroom.

Carlos talked about an incident in class.

Carlos: And then was...there was eventually one teacher that like...I just hated her! I don't hate her now...I hated her like before.

Dorothy: Why did you hate her before?

Carlos: One day she told me I wasn't gonna be nothing in life.

Dorothy: In class?

Carlos: No...she pulled me out and like said what are you doing? Cause I like used to talk alot in that class....and she would be like what are you doing with your life? Your gonna be nothing…you know? I think it was last year...I had her again. And right when I walked into class she was like Carlos get up. And I'm like...please you know...I wanna try to better myself and she was like...no! I don't trust you...get out!

> Get out! And I'm like, dang you know? And that like made me hate her even more. And I talked to the principal about it and he's like...well, I'ma put you back in….just try. And I tried and I'm trying to tell him like...alright...she don't want me in there...and so I went in there and tried. And I don't know. She just thought I was talking and was like...Carlos go to the back. And I'm like...ahh...ok..but I'm not doing nothing. And she's just like go to the back…go to the back. And then I went...and then she just told me to get out. And then I'm like wow!

Carols' comments illustrate how a teacher's actions may be well-intended, but can cause students to question their presence in the classroom. Although students are constantly negotiating peer and teacher relationships, it is the formal and informal verbal exchanges that urban youth have with educators that directly impacts whether they feel a sense of inclusion or alienation. Carlos points out that educators give the perception that they are welcoming of students, but he expresses uncertainty in their ability to actually do their job. His teacher lacked what Bryk & Schneider (2003) refer to as *relational trust. Relational trust* between teachers and students is developed through daily interactions and exchanges in the classroom and at school (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). His teacher's actions during the school year carried more weight than their initial outward pleasant appearance. Carlos points out how relationships with teachers are multi-layered and complex. As students get to know the customs and mannerisms of teachers by their actions and behaviors, some urban youth may begin to challenge the authenticity of how educators present themselves to youth. His comments demonstrate how if teachers themselves are not engaged in the classroom, then students not only will start to limit their contributions but question the value of education to be a vehicle for change in their lives.

Carlos explains how one of his teachers told him that he would not amount to anything. Researchers have examined the influence of *deficit-oriented thinking* by teachers on the academic performance of students of color (Ford et al., 2001; Ford & Grantham, 2003;

Villegas, 2002). Carlos did not feel that his classroom was an *affirming space* that valued his presence or abilities. Affirming classrooms are spaces that encourage and support all students to achieve academically (Hackman, 2005). After talking with his teacher in the hallway, Carlos says that he was not motivated or encouraged to return to class and focus on school. While it is unclear about the teacher's intentions, Carlos perceived her to be intentionally spotlighting his behavior. Verbal exchange that youth have with educators can be marginalizing if students believe that there is not a seat reserved for them in their teacher's classroom. Similar to Rasheed, he expresses that he was accused of committing a behavioral act- -talking in class and he was visibly punished in front of his peers. Methods that teachers use to discipline youth can result in their repositioning by educators in the classroom in academically punitive ways. The students' comments underscore how educators often lack forgiveness and hold students hostage for their perceived misbehavior.

Gabriella explained an event with one of her teachers.

Gabriella: I got up, gave him his paper. He said what are you doing. I'm like so you won't be mad because you say we're killing the trees that already are killed, here you go. And I signed a pass and I was like I'm leaving. Because not only did you put me on the spot…now you're making everybody look like I'm a bad student.

Dorothy: Yeah.

Gabriella: And I was like, these teachers aren't here for me.

Gabriella: He says in front of the whole class…well maybe you should find a doctor for that because that's your problem.

Dorothy: Hmm.

Gabriella: You forget. Like maybe you should find a doctor to help you out with forgetting things. And he knows I've been through a lot.

Dorothy: Yeah.

Gabriella: I make sure all my teachers are updated. I wasn't dropping out of school. I wasn't showing up because I didn't want to, I'd been going through a lot.

Dorothy: Yeah.

Gabriella: And it's like for him to do that and put me on the spot in front of the kids?

Gabriella felt embarrassed by her teacher for suggesting that she needed to address her forgetfulness in front of her peers. The language that teachers use to communication with urban students holds a certain weight or currency that impacts whether they will disengage or be disrespected in the classroom. During the interview, Gabriella says that she was hospitalized for depression and was not regularly attending school during 10th grade. In an effort not to get behind academically, she contends that she would keep her teachers updated on the status of her depression. Consequently, Gabriella's teacher used this information to humiliate her rather than keeping it as strictly confidential. Moreover, Gabriella was spotlighted by her teacher when he suggested that she was a bad student. She asserts that teachers are not supportive of her needs, but instead criticize students openly. The words that educators use while interacting with students can not only create harm but be emotionally damaging.

The verbal and social exchanges and public confrontations that the students had with various teachers demonstrated to that they did not belong. Many of the students that described teacher altercations as a significant factor that impacted them leaving high school were males of color. All of the male students described how educators would often pick fights with them in the classroom in ways that solicited negative reactions, and that resulted in punitive penalties. A core problem that students expressed with educators was a lack of authentic care for them as students instead of troublemakers.

Consequently, the students were not able to escape hostile classroom contexts unless they were willing to devalue the diploma. How teachers treated students as trespassers and not permanent residents made several of them feel that they were socially excluded and simply unwanted.

Escaping Social Exclusion from Adults and Managing Role-Strain

There are various in-school and out-of-school factors that impacted why many of the students left high school. In this section, I discuss how the students felt after leaving school. Some of the students believed that leaving was a good decision while others started to miss school. They were able to escape social exclusion from adult relationships, role performance anxiety, and daily stressors. Initially, the students described how their departure produced less anxiety, more freedom, and relief. When many of the students were able to escape from school, they had a tangible reduction in the degree of social exclusion that they encountered, and they had fewer roles to perform outside of the classroom. Still, even after their exit, many of the students described how transitioning and living in the "real world" was not as they had expected.

Feelings of Leaving School

When I interviewed JoQuan, he explained how leaving school produced a sense of reassurance, because he felt that it posed to be less of a burden in his life. JoQuan explained how he felt when he left school.

> **Dorothy:** So after you left school how did you feel?
>
> **JoQuan:** Definitely felt relieved.
> **Dorothy:** Why?
>
> **JoQuan:** Cause it's alot of pressure on you to get all A's and everything and do well...not even to get all A's just to get a good grade. It's not...it's not alot of pressure

either...it shouldn't be. But you might be going through something in your life that might halt you from doing well.

While in school JoQuan struggled academically with completing homework and other assignments. He asserts that leaving school made him feel relieved, because he had difficulty navigating his position as a student that was not a high-achiever. JoQuan contends that the classroom was a stressful environment for him, because the focus was on high academic achievement. The sense of relief that he described after leaving seemed to have resulted from feeling a sense of detachment from various schooling expectations. JoQuan argues that he felt a lot of pressure, because there was an expectation that he would get a good grade. He says that there should not be pressure on students to get certain grades in school, and that students have other obligations that can impact their learning and engagement. His comments underscore how out-of-school factors shape students susceptibility to be academically engaged in the classroom. Moreover, how the pressure to achieve can serve as a stressor for youth that are contemplating leaving school.

Theresa discussed how she felt after she left the classroom.

Dorothy: So after you left school, how did you feel?

Theresa I was happy at first and but then staying home everyday doing nothing really got boring.

Dorothy: How would you describe a typical day that you weren't in school?

Theresa: I would wake up around 11am take a shower, brush my teeth. Eat...facebook…twitter…texting...then I would chill with some friends and go back home, and it was just the same thing over and over again and it got boring after a while.

Theresa examined how her initial decision to leave school made her feel a sense of contentment. However, she points out that her daily routine resulted in her feeling bored and

not actively engaged in any activities outside of school. Youth that become disengaged and that exit school may have justifiable reasons for why they should not be there. Her suggestion illustrates how these factors can make the initial decision to leave one of happiness rather than disappointment. Theresa's comments highlight how leaving school can result in mixed feelings for students, and demonstrate how they often continue to negotiate their exit even after they leave. She argues that while not in school, she used various forms of social media. This included internet sources that allowed her to stay connected to numerous mediums. Theresa also says that she would hang out with friends while not in school. However, it was her routine outside of school that caused her to question her lifestyle. Similar to Theresa, Merissa expressed her feelings of not being enrolled in high school.

> **Merissa:** I felt, I felt overwhelmed. I felt relieved at first...but then I felt really overwhelmed cause I had no one to help me that kinda knows where to go to, you know? Where I could find resources. What I could do.

Although Terri said that she felt happiness and then bored after leaving, Merissa contends that she felt relieved followed by being overwhelmed. Her comments demonstrate how the decision to leave is a long-term process, and how students continue to negotiate their absence in complex ways. Merissa asserts that leaving school allowed her to feel relief. Consequently, after operating away from school, her absence began to be overpowering. It became more stressful for her to navigate the reality of not being enrolled in school. She highlights how youth that leave often lack supportive services from individuals, and information that may be useful to their re-enrollment. Additionally, Merissa says that he was not sure of what she "could do". Although Merissa exited school to obtain relief, her exit appeared to have caused her several unintended consequences.

Bacari shared his sentiments about exiting school.

> **Bacari:** If they left school {other students} then I wouldn't concern myself with them...and I was a judgmental person too...I was always that kid that said, I don't know what yall parents are doing...I would never do that, I was never into that...and then I realized that like...like...a month ago when I wasn't in school..I was like...I always said that I wasn't gonna be one of those kids...who dropped out of school...who... smoked weed...and who wore their pants down...and like, my mother didn't want me to drop out of school. She would kill me if I dropped out of school...and then, low and behold...I dropped out of school.
>
> **Dorothy:** How did she {mother} feel about that when she saw you?
>
> **Bacari:** ...she...she...I mean there wasn't really much she could do...I mean…what can you do? She saw that school...she saw...she saw that school even before I dropped out that school wasn't really work for me cause my grades. She saw that it really wasn't gonna work. Like she would have to get me help, which it worked out that she did. But she had already predicted that...she told me that...ya know, school's not gonna work for you...so we have to find you something else.

Bacari highlights how leaving school may not be a planned act. Rather he asserts that he thought negatively about students that would leave school, and that he would question the role of parents in keeping his peers enrolled. However, he explains that he came to the realization that he was following the same pattern of other students. Bacari describes that he would try to distance himself from his peers that were involved in more mischievous activities outside of school. Despite, his efforts to distinguish his behavioral actions from other students, he eventually left school and followed down a path that he initially was trying to avoid. Additionally, Bacari discusses the role that his mother played in how he felt about leaving school. He argues that there was minimal guidance that his mother could give him, because she could see his disengagement from school. Bacari says that his grades were a significant factor in why his mother believed that his current school was not adequate to support his academic needs. He suggests that his mother had preexisting suspicious that he may leave high school prior to graduating. Jacob also discussed how he felt when he left school.

> **Jacob:** When I left school, I felt like…I felt like I was ready for the real world. like I could start to make money. I felt like I put up enough with the teachers and all....cause that's what it's like. You go to school and just like the teachers yelling at you, or it's just like…its...it's always something with the teachers...it's not a problem with the work, it's a problem with the teachers.
>
> **Devon:** When I was at home not doing nothing…I felt like…I felt like…like a dropout like...not really doing nothing and… I hate…I hate that feeling like…feeling like I'm just sitting around and just wasting time, so I was like I gotta do something.

Jacob described why he believed that leaving school was a good decision. He states that he was "ready for the real world". He felt that transitioning into the real world would allow him to seek employment and be able to start making money. Jacob asserts that the high school diploma had limited immediate value to him and his current circumstances. Moreover, he underscores how leaving school allowed him to escape the negative treatment of his teachers. Jacob argues that his teachers played a key role in why he believed that attending school was no longer an option. The schooling context was one of constant verbal confrontations with teachers and those exchanges were a typical occurrence in the classroom. How students feel after leaving school is often associated with the type of interpersonal conflicts that youth have with school staff. Jacob's comments illustrate the volatile outcomes that urban youth of color negotiate, and how they may be unable to fully detach themselves from circumstances even after they leave school. He contends that the problems that he had with teachers including how they communicated with him made attending school less desirable. Leaving school for many of the students simply resulted in a sense of serenity and of personal relief. In comparison to Jacob, Devon says that he felt like a "dropout", because he was not actively engaged in anything while not in school. He expresses personal dissatisfaction with not being in school. Students that leave school may have initial feelings similar to Jacob or Devon.

Both students ended up leaving school, but still keep their options open for returning back to school.

Conclusion

The school context played a significant role in why many of the students initially decided to leave school. They encountered negative peer relationships and interactions that made them feel socially excluded in an environment that was structured to promote learning and engagement. Several students expressed feelings of alienation and marginalization, because they struggled to fit-in with various cultural expectations that their peers defined and policed in the classroom. Instead of assimilating to their peer culture, some of the students used avoidance or silencing as a method to preserve themselves as individuals. Other students that I interviewed described how they altered their school identity to be accepted by peers. The desire to receive acceptance required the students to "follow the crowd" and to question themselves as adolescents. The students underscore how adolescent development is not static, but actively reconstructed by the type of schooling experiences that youth have within the classroom and at school.

Moreover, the relationships that students had with adult figures in school impacted their ability to navigate the diploma. Adults hold an authoritarian position in schools that is often not challenged but legitimized. Students of color that have poor relationships with school staff will be subjected to treatment that may not be warranted or that is overtly punitive. Many of the students suggested that there was a lack of authentic caring for their personal and academic welfare by adults at school. Instead of serving as advocates for them in the classroom, several students highlighted how school staff are absent, ill-equipped, or pessimistic about their future. The teachers and guidance counselors acted as permanent

obstacles that they had to navigate in order to remain. The male students of color that I interviewed suggested that teachers humiliated them in class, and would instigate verbal exchanges and confrontations. This made the students feel that they were not welcomed in a place that depicts itself as educating the needs of all students.

For many of the students leaving school simply made sense. It was required for them to preserve their identity, and to reclaim their sense of dignity. The student's initial feelings of relief and excitement were replaced with regret and personal disappointment. Although their timely exit from the classroom allowed them to gain a new perspective, their decision resulted in various personal and social consequences that many of them had not anticipated. After their physical absence from school many of the students began to reevaluate the value of a diploma. Their reevaluation of the diploma allowed them to reclaim their identity as students and as youth that had more to gain than to lose. This prompted their initial thoughts of returning back to high school for a second chance. However, returning back to school required them to face new challenges. The realities of having to transition from a "dropout" to "returner" as urban students of color was more than what they had expected.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE TRANSITIONAL PROCESS OF RETURNING

> *"There's two types that return right? Your returning on your own. That's the majority of our students. And then there are the ones who are being forced. Parents drag you in…court said you have to come here. See, those are two totally different student philosophies we're talking about. Right now I'm talking about the kids who want to come back…young people…young adults who want to come back. One…they realize: A) that there's opportunity that they want to take advantage of, but they cannot either because they're not a high school graduate…they're not…you know…they pretty much did not qualify for what they're trying to do…B) they have a job…they get stuck you know"?*
>
> -Dropout Recovery Specialist Re-entry Center

Introduction

In many ways, the decision to leave school was not a decision at all. Rather, it was co- constructed by various aspects and entities that depicted the diploma as unobtainable, and school as a hostile venture that was impossible to navigate and that posed limited success for them to achieve. When I interviewed the students on how they felt when they left school, majority expressed that they were finally able to exhale. They felt free, able to breathe, and were released from the pressure of operating in educationally toxic schooling environments. However, despite feeling the shackles fall off their wrists when they left school, many of the students described how "dropout stereotypes" then began to follow them wherever they intended to go. Although many of the students did not assume the "dropout" identity, several of their narratives highlighted the gendered and racialized consequences of being a male and female student of color without a high school diploma. They perceived that they could be someone without school, but the person that society defined as a "dropout" was not who they intended to be. Their identities were already socially defined, and ascribed to them whether they actually assumed and embraced the "dropout" identity or not.

In this section, I examine the daily encounters and lived experiences of students after leaving school and how they navigated returning. First, I argue that the students experienced various forms of social identity threat that had a greater level of intensity due to their urban context, race, and gender classification. Given that the students were not attending school, they had to learn how to navigate the social stereotypes that majority of them did not anticipate prior to leaving. The students were not able to escape negatively orientated labels that were associated with their new non-student identity. Second, how these racialized and gendered stereotypes were defined and understood by the students shaped how they then internalized notions that they were simply what society projected them to be -- "dropouts". They were simultaneously negotiating the intersectionality of race and gender after leaving high school with what that meaning represented in an urban context. The students could not break away from the stigmatized marker that was associated with early school withdrawal. Third, I examine factors that influenced the students' decision to return, and the adaptation strategies that they employed to adjust to their new school terrain. How they were able to perform the student role was influenced by their ability to transition between multiple worlds, respond to racial and gender stereotypes, and negotiate out-of-school and in-school stressors.

Escaping Imposed Stereotypes: Negotiating Social Identity Threat

Students that leave high school prior to graduating have a unique set of experiences that are socially constructed and defined by their identity in out-of-school and in-school contexts. Black and Hispanic urban youth that leave because of in-school factors exit classrooms around the country to escape inequitable treatment from educators, spotlighting from administrators, and overtly poor relationships with school staff. Comparatively,

students that reside in negative neighborhood contexts may be pulled out of school to assume a life that they believe is the only and most viable option for themselves. Adolescence is a critical period in a child's life, because it is a time where youth are shaping their identity, and where identity threats can be more punitive in school (Sherman et al., 2013). Yet, examining why students leave school is challenging because youth identities are complex, multi-faceted, and ever changing. Still, the educational experiences of Black and Hispanic urban youth that leave school are deeply rooted within a larger social paradigm that has been defined by an individual's race and gender. This is further contextualized in urban districts. Purdie-Vaughns et al. (2008) argues:

> "Certain features or cues in a setting may create the expectation that a person's treatment will be contingent on one of their social identities. Social *identity contingencies* "are possible judgments, stereotypes, opportunities, restrictions, and treatments that are tied to one's social identity in a given setting" (p. 615).

An individual's social identity or how society defines and dictates their place in the world will impact how they then perform, understand, and come to know their position in various social institutions. For urban youth at-risk of leaving school, how they are treated in the classroom is contingent on their race, gender, social class, and other identity markers. Within school, the judgments, values, and restrictions that shape teacher practices and policies are dependent on the type of students that they perceive to be valued or excluded.

The concept of *identity threat* poses that negative stereotypes about one's academic ability can produce stress and influence educational outcomes (Shabel et al., 2013). Negative stereotypes about the academic performance or lack of engagement of students of color are predominant narratives within educational research. These negative conceptions of students of color reinforce persistent issues in education. Purdie-Vaughns

(2008) asserts that individuals who are ascribed to stigmatized groups may challenge their validation within mainstream social settings. Cook (2012) argues that there are long-term consequences of students of color being exposed to stereotypes about their "group", and for low-achievers this subjection leads to the perception that "people like me do not belong here" (p.1). Consequently, these negative labels placed on students of color often perpetuate from the initial source that feeds into the problem of their underperformance. Students of color operate in schools as identity-threatened groups (Sherman et al., 2013). Yet, there are key differences in how identity-threatened groups cope with stereotypical connotations in school that influence academic success for Black and Hispanic youth. For example, Sherman et al. (2013) contends:

> "Hispanic students can believe that their ethnic group is less likely to succeed than other groups, stereotypes that stem from cultural beliefs in the United States that immigrants, second language speakers in general, and Spanish speakers in particular are less likely to succeed in school than people who are born in the United States and are primarily English speakers" (p.2).

In comparison to Black students, Hispanic youth may perceive their ability to achieve in school to be shaped by social stereotypes of immigrant groups. Hispanic youth also may encounter differences in the type of identity-threat that they experience because of speaking English as a second language or the paradigm in schools that these students will underperform academically. Black students encounter what Steele (1995) describes as *stereotype threat* where youth perceive that they are going to confirm negative representations of their race. Steele (1995) argues that "it is the frustration that makes the stereotype -- as an allegation of inability -- relevant to their performance and thus raises the possibility that they have an inability linked to their race" (p.798). Examining social identity threat for students of color who leave school prior to graduation can shed light to the various ways to how they shape and reconstruct their identity. Moreover, the role that social

exclusion plays in intensifying social identity threat in out-of- school contexts.

"Dropout" Stereotypes

As the students contemplated returning to school, they had to navigate various cultural norms and behavioral expectations that society created for them due to their "dropout" status. When I asked students to describe their experience transitioning back to school, many of them discussed how they had to negotiate "dropout" stereotypes. These stereotypes were based on their race and gender, but were more contextualized within an urban environment. Although returning to school was an individual and collective decision that the students made, they expressed frustration with how a "dropout" label continued to follow them even after they re-enrolled. As they now returned to school, they had to navigate expectations that were attached to them and their student identity.

Racial Stereotypes and Media Profiling For Returners

For students of color that are debating whether to return, they will encounter various obstructions in school that will have a significant influence on if they step back into the classroom. Several of the students that I interviewed discussed how they were battling against racial and gendered stereotypes that served as obstacles to their re-entry. These stereotypes made them question themselves as students of color that were stigmatized by a "dropout" label that did not disappear once they chose to return back to school. These negative connotations that latched onto their identity could have proven to be detrimental to their decision to come back to school. The students struggled to resist and avoid the markers that were attached to their race, gender, and "dropout" status as urban youth of color. However, instead of being a critical factor in why the students exited again, many of the youth suggested that they rejected such notions in defining their return to school and pathway to graduation. Rasheed spoke admittedly about negative

stereotypes.

> **Dorothy:** Do you feel like there's negative stereotypes about people who do leave school and return?
>
> **Rasheed:** Yeah! Cause your…you're a quote unquote bad student. You weren't a good student. You weren't good in school…you were bad in school. And it's just… and ...if you're a black kid it's even worse cause…it's like you're a black kid and if you dropped out of school then you're gonna sell drugs…your gonna kill people. You're gonna make…you're gonna make nothing with your life. You're gonna be a bumb.
>
> **Dorothy:** Why did you say that it's even worse if you're black?
>
> **Rasheed:** Cause…its stereotypically it's like…your never see an Asian person dropout of school you know? And if they do...then nobody would hear about it you know? The dropout rate in Constance High is high because majority were minorities, you know what I'm saying? If you go to Armstrong High the dropout rates not that high so if you do dropout… it… balances out because you know, you're with majority white kids. They {students of color} dropout…so what you know? It balances out.

Rasheed's comments illustrate that early school withdrawal has racial implications for students of color. His remarks are indicative of the role that a student's initial decision to leave school, regardless of the reason has negatively orientated outcomes for urban youth. Blake et al. (2011) contends that black students are viewed as being "more defiant, delinquent, and aggressive than white children" (p.93). Such perceptions of Black children in school poses that they are bad students that are menacing, and destructive. He underscores how race coupled with "dropout" creates unconstructive and overtly harmful symbolic meaning for black youth in school. These racial biases render black students in ways that are comparable to how they have been labeled prior to leaving. Additionally, Rasheed highlights racial disporporationality in how black and Asian youth are perceived at school. Rasheed points out that black youth encounter more negative stereotypes than Asian youth. Lee (1996) argues that the model minority stereotype is a "hegemonic

construct" and places a "wedge between Asian Americans and other groups of people of color" (p.120). Although, Rasheed is challenging the *model minority* stereotype he does not make distinctive differences between students that do perform academically by racially disaggregating ethnicities within the Asian culture. Rasheed suggests that at Armstrong High, a predominately white school, the number of students of color that leave are overshadowed by what he suggests are "majority white kids" and that it "balances it out". Instead of revealing racial differences in students that leave school, Rasheed believes that viewing aggregate data conceals gaps in *who* is graduating at majority white high schools.

Jacob spoke about racial stereotypes.

Dorothy: Do you feel that there are certain stereotypes about certain students coming back to school if you're a black student?

Jacob: Yeah....it all on tv cause everything's on tv.

Dorothy: What do you mean?

Jacob: Yeah. Like alright, you know how like they'll have a black male...like something's missing and they'll all just say it was a black male…{laughs} or something like that...so it's like when you walk into the door they automatically know...it's like everyone labeled...umm…that's what tv makes it...tv makes it so that everyone's labeled. Cause I'm quite sure when I come through here people look at me and people judge me already...and ain't nobody know anything…you know? Until I say something or until they ask me something. But…it's just how it is.

Jacob believes that there are stereotypes about returning students of color that derive from various media outlets. Howard et al. (2012) defines this depiction as *social imagery* in how black males are negatively represented and invalidated. For male students of color, such stigmatizing markers not only harm youth in the classroom, but it can make them re-question their initial decision to return. Jacob's comments highlight how the intersection of race and

gender mediates how students experience school even when they re-enroll. Ferguson (2002) asserts that "the image of the black male criminal is more familiar because of its prevalence in the print and electronic media as well as in scholarly work" (p.78). Jacob's suggestions reveal how negative perceptions of black male students have a significant impact on their transitional process of returning, and on their ability to navigate the classroom. Jacob highlights how media is used to racialize early school withdrawal, and its impact on the academic engagement of students of color. Black males face a unique way of typecasting through media profiling. This labeling is then equated to personal judgment of male students of color prior to them even opening their mouth.

Luis described racial stereotypes for Hispanic students.

> **Luis:** You know because a lot of Hispanics are not able to finish school so we have a very low rate, you know? Students, we have a very low percentage on actually passing high school and going to college, so that's why there are like a lot of help programs to help Hispanics for that. And I don't know, just honestly, in our island, there's not that many people who go to school.
>
> **Luis:** So it's rare to find an actual Hispanic to go to school…so.
>
> **Dorothy:** Why do you think that's the case?
>
> **Luis:** I honestly do not know.

Luis suggests that low graduation rates for Hispanic youth feeds into a pipeline that is not to college. For Luis, negative racial stereotypes of students of color, and in particular Hispanic youth, are based on his experiences rather than generalized statements about his race. Racial disparities in who graduates has a critical influence on how urban youth of color perceive, understand, and come to know who they will become as students. Additionally, the value that urban youth of color will place on obtaining a diploma. Luis expresses uncertainty in why many of his peers were not able to finish high school, and underscores how students may question negative racial stereotypes in ways that are left

unanswered.

Theresa discussed racial and gender stereotypes.

Dorothy: Do you feel like being a black female returning people think already certain things about you?

Theresa: Yeah...most stereotypes of black girls is that they always get pregnant at young ages. So, they dropout and they gotta take care of their baby.

Theresa stated that race and gender play a role in how students perceive of themselves when they return to school. She asserts that black girls are the victims of negative stereotypes, and that the primary narrative about black girls is that they are teen mothers who exit school to "take care of their baby". Although pregnancy was not a factor in why Theresa did not graduate, she argues that she was subjected to this stereotype regardless of her reason for not being enrolled and attending. Such labeling of students as *black* and *girls* in tainted and rancid ways presents black female youth as outside of the mainstream white feminized school culture. Evans-Winters (2010) argues "for many Black girls, their identities shifts between their personalized identities shaped by their socialization in their immediate families and neighborhoods, and the perspectives of White male or female middle class school administrators and teachers" (p.21). These unconstructive perceptions of black girls have negative implications for how students view themselves in terms of their racial and gendered student identity in the classroom. Similar to Theresa, Gabriella talked about race and returning.

Gabriella: There was a Dominican in my school. She ended up pregnant. And a lot of my friends were like, oh my goodness. Like a lot of friends or people in general, any race, they believe that it's mainly Spanish girls that get pregnant at a young age and have to leave school.

Dorothy: Uh huh.

> **Gabriella:** So I was that Spanish girl in my school that proved, not all Spanish girls are the same. And it's not just Spanish girls…its white girls…it's African American…it's Spanish…it's Chinese…it's Indian. It like it happens to every girl.

Gabriella argues that being a teen mother is a dominant narrative that she has encountered as a female student of color that is returning to school. She illustrates how non-white girls are viewed in sexualized ways that are deemed as impure and unworthy to be in school. Gabriella describes how one of her peers left school because she was pregnant, and to demonstrate how individuals assume that the behavioral actions of girls of color as overtly negative. Both Gabriella and Theresa indicate how female youth of color have to navigate deficit-orientated assumptions about their out-of-school lives. These deficit-oriented beliefs are then used by schools to dilute the counternarratives of teenage girls that do not fit into these radicalized and gendered stereotypes. Female students of color that are unable to steer pass these conceptions may be doomed to leave school again.

Mia and Bacari present a different perspective on racial stereotypes.

> **Mia:** No not really, it's like everybody talks about everybody else. The Black, White, Hispanic, Italian. I feel like everybody talks. I feel like at first when I was a freshman I did hear…oh White people are so smart umm…then I heard Black and Puerto Ricans were just dropouts.

> **Bacari:** Umm...not really not to me....if anything its stereotypes at least for different races...at least for people who don't usually do the whole school thing...and then the President's Black so it really doesn't matter anymore....maybe a couple years ago....why doesn't a black kid finish school? Why doesn't a black kid this?

Mia and Bacari assert that there are traditional racial stereotypes about students of color that leave school and attempt to return. However, distinct from the other students they both contend that race has a diluted value, and is no longer a primary factor in how youth experience and navigate school. Bacari takes a *colorblind* perspective on the role of race

and returning to school. Bonilla-Silva (2013) defines *colorblind racism* as the mainstream white ideal of social equality without consideration to structural, economic, and political inequalities that promote racial privilege. To Bacari the election of Barack Obama as President makes race a null factor. He says that prior to Obama becoming President racial stereotypes were more visible for certain subgroups but that these notions no longer exist.

Gender and Returning To School

Several of the students talked about the role of gender in returning to school. Specifically, how there are disparities between male and female students of color that leave school and subsequently re-enroll. Mia talked about gender differences for returners.

> **Mia:** I felt like a female leaves school, automatically she's doing something wrong. But if a guy leaves school, it's like...turn they head for that. Better believe he's gonna roll up and come back. But if a female leaves oh shoot, like she's doing something wrong but if a guy leaves he's just gonna smoke up or something.
>
> **Dorothy:** Why do you think like that's the case?
>
> **Mia:** Because like I was a freshman and when I left school and I came back, I found I had this big old rumor about me and I didn't do nothing. And because I left with a guy… assumingly everybody thought I had did something. They said…well it was because I left and I'm a freshman, I'm this and I'm that. So like I kind of went through it myself so as like I kind of know the feeling.

Wayman's (2001) study of returning youth indicated that gender was not related to re-enrollment. However, Mia's comments underscore the impact that gender plays in how students of color experience returning back to school. She argues that there are gender based differences in the type of perceptions that individuals have about female youth prior to and after re-entry. Mia says that there are more punitive penalties for girls than their male counterparts. Female students are viewed as engaging in inappropriate behaviors that ultimately led to their exit. In comparison, Mia asserts that they are welcomed back to

the classroom in ways that are distinctly different than girls. Gender disparities in who returns are grounded in the interpretation, understanding, and actions of schools toward female youth. In many ways, the transitional process of returning is more marginalizing and confrontational for female students of color.

These students have to continue to battle social identity threat when re-enrolling. Not only did Mia have to navigate returning back to school, she argues that interpersonal relationships with her peers impacted her ability to focus in the classroom. Mia was managing more than student gossip, but was battling gendered stereotypes about female youth that leave school in ways that were hyper-sexualized.

Similar to Mia, Luis spoke about gender disparities.

> **Dorothy:** So if you're a girl that dropped out, do you think people think certain things? Or if you're a male that dropped out?
>
> **Luis:** Oh yeah. Basically if you're a girl and you dropped out like no matter what they would think you're a ho. And a dude, I don't know just, you're not really a ho, just you're stupid.
>
> **Dorothy:** Why do you think it's like, if you're a guy is that you're stupid?
>
> **Luis:** Cause, I don't know it goes way back since elementary schools, girls always thought they were smarter than guys so.

In comparison to Mia, Luis described how girls are ascribed more negative perceptions and reputations by their peers when they re-enroll back into high school. Luis was not shameful in his explanation for how female students are perceived when they return. Although, returning back to school may be considered a monumental time for students of color, in many ways previous labels assigned to youth as "dropouts" are often not swamped for "returner" but with more stigmatized labels like "ho" for female youth. Such derogatory language that he asserts is used to describe returning female students can foster a classroom

environment that rejects them as respectable and of value. Luis suggests that returning male students are perceived as being "stupid". Luis' remarks emphasize how leaving school is sexualized for females, but is based on academic underperformance for male students. He believes that female students' sexuality define and shape their experiences when returning regardless of why they left school. He argues that males are deemed incapable to perform the defined "student" role, and this stigma remains with them after they re-enroll. Luis makes the point that male students who leave school are recognized as unintelligent, because as he suggests "girls are smarter". This ideal that being "smarter" is distinct from Mia's comments about what males experience when they return back to school. Luis suggests that from elementary school, girls are portrayed as more intelligent, and these gendered conceptualizations shape the transitional process for returning youth in later grades. These stereotypes about male and female students of color become major threats to their identity, and especially for students that are deemed "dropouts".

> Rasheed also described the process of re-enrolling back into school as gendered.
>
> **Rasheed:** Male and female? Umm...kinda. Well, like I said it's the same thing you know, if you dropout then you're gonna kill people, you're gonna sell drugs. Women, you're gonna go…date bad people, you're gonna go have kids you're gonna do this, that, and the third. You not gonna do anything you know? You're gonna go strip. You're gonna be a prostitute.
>
> **Dorothy:** Where do you think that comes from?
>
> **Rasheed:** Stereotypes. And like they say, most stereotypes aren't true but at the same time it's like…well, that's where they come from. They come from people…you know…just saying…just looking down you know? And then…it's like people hearing about these stereotypes…they kinda…they fall victim to them cause they feel like… that's all I'm worth you know?

Adolescents are actively crafting new identities at home and at school. It is a "time of authoring and constructing a sense of identity and self, but that this authoring is not a

solitary endeavor" (Bickerstaff, 2009, p. 43). Rasheed's comments illustrate how student's identity constructed is rooted in the ways that they are depicted and then internalized by youth. He contends that the portrayal of students as dangerous, aggressive, and criminalized is influenced by gender stereotypes. He argues that female students encounter more harsh stereotypes than male students when they return. Rasheed underscores how female students are subjected to dehumanizing representations. This includes being portrayed as impure and contaminated youth even after they attempt to return back to school. His comments illustrate how the transitional process of returning is influenced by gender norms for urban students. Rasheed's comments suggest that there are underlining symbolic meanings attached to feminine constructs for girls youth of color that are re-enrolling. Rasheed explains that these negative representations of girls originate from stereotypes that are created by individuals in society. He asserts that stereotypes are socially constructed and highlights how the transmission of these negative labels impacts students that are choosing to re-enroll. Rasheed believes that students are ultimately victimized by these social images, and that consequently youth will began to embrace and assume identities that are counter to their actual value and worth.

In comparison to other youth, Merissa discussed gender roles for returners.

> **Merissa:** I feel like in a way if you're female it's easier to get back in school because alot of the times males like have the expectation to maintain a household no matter...like if people have kids young you know the mother takes care of the kids, but then the men are to maintain the finances and the households and everything else. And I guess it gets harder just because of what the males' stereotype is. To get back into school you never really think about construction workers and women you always think construction workers and men. Those are the jobs that you don't normally need a diploma for...you
> can just go into it.

Merissa outlines how the type of gender roles and expectations that students have are

critical to the transitional process of returning back to school. Her comments underscore that gender expectations at home and school play a key role in who returns after they leave. Merissa asserts that there are dual roles that female and male students perform, but that that there are different meanings associated with these roles based on an individual's gender identification. She believes that although female students may be perceived as the primary caregivers of their children, that males are obligated to provide financial support and sustainability to a household. Despite her discussion of gender roles and expectations that impact re-enrolled youth, she argues that it is harder for boys to actually return back to school. Merissa equates these differences to pre-existing stereotypes or identity threats that are gendered for male youth. Merissa's comments illustrate how the school context is shaped by an individual's perception of their experience as a returning student, and how out-of-school factors cultivate their initial decision to re-enroll.

Darri explained the challenges that students face when returning.

Dorothy: Do you think it's harder or easier for students to come back to school if they're male?

Darri: I think it's harder.

Dorothy: Why would you say that?

Darri: Cause...stereotypes...especially for males of color…they go through a lot.

Dorothy: So what are some examples of some of the stereotypes?

Darri: Umm….school is not cool or like...getting money in the streets is the best way…or stuff like that.

Darri described how male students of color face more obstacles in returning. Her comments are indicative of how female and male students of color experience school in complex yet individualized ways. Morris' (2005) study argues that "identity formation

woks through intersections of race, class, and gender" (p.44). Students that return to school are reconstructing their identity and how they form who they are and who they will become. It is shaped by the classroom context. Students of color that attend the same school will have distinctive educational outcomes due to gender and racial dynamics in the classroom. Darri believes that these negative stereotypes are detrimental, and more arduous to navigate for males of color that are attempting to return back to school. JoQuan also described gender differences in returning.

> **Dorothy:** Do you feel like being a male it's easier to come back to school?
>
> **JoQuan:** I honestly think that it's real hard for both in their own way to come back. Cause as a dude you can...like if you looking bumby and off point...people are gonna notice...people are gonna talk about you…and you have to have a good first impression and you gotta keep that impression and it's the same exact thing for girls too...but I guess people may be a little bit more forgiving.
>
> **Dorothy:** Why you think so?
>
> **JoQuan:** I think it's just about the same but if you see a girl wear something the same
> like twice a week ya know...I don't think it really matters but if you see a dude do it...then like…I don't know...people are gonna say something about you.

JoQuan stated that there are no gender disparities for students that return to school, but he suggests that male and female youth encounter some barriers. He highlights how dress is used as a marker for who is accepted by their peers when they come back to the classroom. He describes that male students have to exhibit a certain persona that requires them to look appropriate in front of other students. Although, for many students that are returning they have already made a first impression that they are trying to change. JoQuan's comments highlight how he believes that when students return to school that they are not only given a second chance, but that youth are afforded a new chance. He illustrates how students may assume that the "slate is wiped clean" when they re-enroll, and that their previous behaviors

are discarded from memory. He describes how symbolic differences in the meaning and expectations that are associated with an individual's attire configure the schooling context for returners in gendered ways.

Learning to Value a Diploma and Not School

For many of the students that I interviewed, the decision to return to school was a simple one. After being physically and emotionally detached from various school actors including teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and peers being on the "outside" -- away from the classroom made students rethink the material value that having a diploma would offer. The students had the opportunity to operate as individuals without high school diplomas. Their narratives illustrate how not being in school allowed them to reassess its worth, and their place as youth of color that society viewed as "dropouts". When the students initially exited school, they expressed feelings of calm and relief. Consequently, their liberation from school left most of them disappointed and filled with personal emptiness. Their attempts to operate on the "outside" without a diploma resulted in more individual and social penalties than they had originally imagined. In many cases, several of the students began to miss school, felt even more socially excluded, and began to reevaluate whether the benefits of pursing a high school diploma again outweighed the risks.

Resiliency and Proving Them Wrong

Several of the students contended that the decision to return to high school was advantageous and held various social benefits.

> **Gabriella:** The main reason why I was like, I want to go back to school is to prove…a lot of people in general…they try to bring you down so you won't become what you want to become because they see you less than them.
>
> **Gabriella:** So the reason why…what made me like oh I'm going to school? It's not

> to prove to them anymore, it's for me to be like…I know I can be somebody. I'm going to prove to myself, no matter what I'd heard or who hurt me or what I've been through. I'm going to do it.

For Gabriella it was self-affirming when she returned back to high school. Iachini et al.'s (2013) study on re-engagement of youth in dropout recovery programs indicated that returning youth cited self-determined motivation and wanting to prove that they could graduate as factors for their return. Similar to the students in Iachini et al.'s (2013) study, Gabriella believes that she was proving to herself that she could finish her education and that she had worth. Her comments show how returning to school can be an inner struggle for some students as they reassess the value that others have placed on them when they were "dropouts". Also, Gabriella points out that her peers generally are pessimistic about her future. Still, she reassures herself during the interview that she is not a product of her environment. JoQuan and Darri highlighted factors that influenced their decision to return back to school.

> **JoQuan:** Why did I want to? Well...it was because the last time I was in school, I did a really bad job on my report card...and I wanted to do alot better this time...show that I had it in me.

> **Darri:** Umm...for my son and also for myself and for my brother. Cause they inspire me and I just wanna stay motivated. I can still achieve my goals.

Both students suggest that re-enrolling back into school allowed them to prove to their peers that they are able to be academically successful and to achieve individual goals. These students were navigating social identity threat with a new student identity. For these students resiliency plays a key factor and served to safe-guard them from choosing to remain disconnected from school. Howard (1996) suggests that personal resources can act

as resiliency factors, because it allows youth to have "positive reinforcement and develop a success orientation" (p.7) which leads to self-esteem. Self-esteem and confidence that one can accomplish their goals can be used as a protective factor that promotes resiliency in students that experience marginalization. Motivation is another factor that has been associated with returning back to school after early school withdrawal (Iachini et al., 2013). JoQuan attributes one of the reasons for why he left school to having inadequate grades on his report card. He believes that returning and performing well on class assignments would show that he "had it in him". In comparison, Darri says that she was motivated to return for her child, siblings, and for personal gain. She used her family as inspiration, because they provided her a new found focus and dedication to graduating high school.

Devon talked about how he felt being a student again.

Dorothy: So when you came back how you did feel?

Devon: I still felt like the same person...the same person....but it just hit me like….this is like a whole new…different…well, not whole new...but it's different. And I'm starting to feel old like....{laughs} I gotta get out of here...and all my friends and like cousins and my brother...they all in college right now...and like..I'm supposed to be...I was supposed to have been done. And I'm seeing kids that I was like way older than. I feel like I'm older than them …and seeing that I'm in class with them like whoa! Weren't you in like 1st grade when I was in like 10th grade?

Devon's comments illustrate how for some students returning to school is similar to being in a space that is distinctive from what they once knew it to be. His initial excitement about being in the classroom decreased as he came to the realization that his peers had transitioned to college, and in many ways left him behind. This feeling of being left out made him have more urgency in finishing school. Devon says that he should have

completed high school and have progressed with his cousins and siblings, but instead he was still trying to graduate. It appeared that Devon's decision to return was to avoid being excluded by his peers. However, being back in school intensified his feeling of isolation because he was overage for his grade in comparison to other students. Mia discussed several reasons that prompted her return to school.

> **Mia:** Yeah so I felt really proud of myself that I went back to school. I'm graduating in June if I pass these three classes in time, so I feel really good. One of them {friend} is on their way now, and then the other one is coming tomorrow to finish coming to school. And like they dropped out in 8th grade so it's like, you know. We all had kids. So that kind of like we had to pause and we had to miss days because of appointments, kids are sick. So like, I feel like we shouldn't have to rely on the government to support us. I feel like if we all finish school it would feel good to actually like get an apartment...through us. Like yeah...we did that! You know? I don't think none of us should have to worry about they need to do this or they're gonna take away this. I feel like we did it. We don't have to worry about nobody taking it away because we did that. We worked for it, you know? So now I just feel like if I can do it, anybody can do it.

Mia's comments demonstrate how the high school diploma is viewed as a valuable commodity for students even after they leave the classroom. Mia argues that she is proud of herself for getting back into school, and has encouraged other pregnant teens to re-enroll. She discusses how having kids in high school constrains the type of opportunities that are available, and the degree of public resources that are accessible to female youth. Due to parenting responsibilities, Mia says that she had to rely on government assistance. However, she argues that having government assistance is not desirable, because there are rules and regulations for what she can do. She expresses a keen interest in having independency and self-sufficiency that will allow her to care for her children without public assistance. Mia believes that a high school diploma will afford her the opportunity to have her own residence, and instill a sense of personal pride. Having a high school diploma would make her living conditions more permanent and not dictated by government funds.

Additionally, Mia suggests that working for what she gets in life is more meaningful to her, and that anyone can return to school despite obstacles that they may encounter.

Mia made a few additional comments about why she returned to school.

> **Dorothy:** Why do you want to return to high school to get a diploma, like if you had to name a few reasons why?
>
> **Mia:** Uh it's also like I have a lot of people, I knew like I think it's about that time where I can show people that I'm, I can actually do something --- that I'm not just one of those teenagers that just had a kid and dropped out. I feel like you know, I'm tired of watching everybody doing their thing and I'm tired of... Like I'm just tired of getting treated like I'm a low life. So I feel that if I actually get my diploma you know I have something for somebody to be proud of. That I'm not you know. I'm not a young teen trying to live off the streets with kids. I made mistakes, but I am trying to finish.
>
> **Mia:** When I actually saw my brother's graduation of senior year and that made me like, every time someone has a graduation it's like dang…dang and you know? So seeing people's graduation, like anybody's graduation just made me think like; oh my God. So I feel like it's my turn, too many people having graduations, my turn.

Mia described how returning to school was a way that she would prove people wrong and to contest her "dropout" identity. She challenges notions that suggests that female teen mothers who leave school can return and "actually do something" with their lives. Mia asserts that she was being treated as a "low life" that had minimal promise. The diploma was more than a certificate of merit for Mia, but holds symbolic value and a sense of personal satisfaction. She points out that she made various mistakes including getting pregnant and leaving school.

However, Mia believes that finishing high school would allow her to be exempt from the penalties of her past faults and to focus on her future. Moreover, Mia says that watching her peers graduate high school made her feel left out, because she was not enrolled in a diploma program. Getting back into high school made her feel that it was now "her turn" to

be acknowledged and praised for reaching graduation.

Revaluing the High School Diploma

In comparison to some of the youth that discussed how returning back to school allowed them to prove others wrong, several students asserted that they were put into challenging situations that made them revalue the diploma in their lives. Others argued that they were still contemplating their ability to graduate even after they came back to school. Majority of the students that described that they had to reconsider graduating from high school were males of color. Carlos described an incident that influenced why he decided to return back to school.

> **Carlos:** I mean when I got arrested, I really did not like the treatment. And the way that they arrested me was like really aggressive and I'm like...yo...I'm not doing anything just tell me where to go and what to do and I'll do it. You don't have to grab me. Umm…yeah…and I really didn't like that treatment and they're like just sitting there in a cell and I got arrested with my best friend so like he was in the cell right next to me and I was talking to him through the door and everything and I really did not like that. and umm…that...my mom came to get me and everything and she was all crying and that really just changed my mind like...you know? It breaks your heart just to see me here imagine if I was here for a long time. It would break her heart every day. And umm...I had like..I had like...I wrote...when I got home I wrote them both a letter and I talked to them both like…I'm really sorry and ...and stuff. And my dad was really telling me like education is always the first thing. Like it's always first. Cause that's what umm….make you somebody. And umm…I realize that's really true.

After being arrested, Carlos argues that he had a wakeup call and he began to reassess the value of getting an education. Still, he was negotiating his identity as a non-student with entering school again. The strategies that students use to "deal with multiple identities and the role conflicts that emerge from contradictory role obligations" (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002, p.152) will influence how they then come to re-evaluate the diploma. Carlos described that he suffered harsh treatment during his arrest from police officers for selling drugs. He believes that the treatment was ill-advised and says that it was aggressive and punitive.

Carlos says that while he was in jail he had time to think about the arrest, and how his parents interact with him in a jail cell. For Carlos seeing his parents, and in particular, his mother's response made him question his behavior and actions that were placing him as a criminal rather than a student. He suggests that his father valued getting an education. However, it appears that the value of a diploma had not matriculated into visible gains for Carlos until his arrest. After being released from jail, Carlos expressed a renewed interest in returning to school and performing well academically to reach graduation.

In comparison to other students that talked about why they returned back to school, Rasheed discussed challenges to returning.

> **Rasheed:** It's all willpower. Like me…I…I was here...I signed out on a Monday...yeah, I signed out on a Monday and I was here the next day you know? So, other people, I feel like, you take time off you take years and it's hard to come back. Like I said but at the same time, those people are the ones that....either want something for themselves or they're just stuck in a point where...they sit at home and they're like, what am I supposed to do with my life? I'm not gonna do this for the rest of my life. I need to do something with my life you know? And it's just those people…some people it's hard for…some people it's easy for...some people want it. Some people don't ya know?

Rasheed contends that he was able to return after leaving rather quickly, and asserts that personal willpower propelled him back to school. However, for students that are not enrolled in school for longer periods of time, Rasheed believes that coming back for a diploma is more difficult. During this transitional period, students will value a diploma in distinctively different ways. He points out returning to school can be a change for some students who are contemplating whether striving for the diploma is truly worth it long-term. For some students that reach the end of the road, they may question what their life will amount to if they remain without a high school diploma. He states that other students may come to the realization that returning to school is an unattainable goal, and that this doubt can influence their re-enrollment. When I asked Jacob about returning back to school

he outlined obstacles to his reentry.

> **Jacob:** Well, I'm actually being forced right now cause I have ahh like, I'm going to court and I have this case with my father....he..he said I threatened him or whatever, but I didn't threaten him. he obviously don't like me or something...and so the judge told me to get my high school diploma and stay away from him...so I don't be around him and all I have to do is get my high school diploma and it's like..they're forcing me now...and it's not that easy to get it. I have to go back to court in January and they told me I should have it by January but it's not that easy ...and now...I….I...I...have to rush and it's like everything it just happening over and over again and it's like..like…when I'm doing work and stuff I have to really sit there and read it and take my time with it. I can't just sit there and have something on my conscious where I'm like...alright, there's a deadline let me hurry up...cause I'm gonna get it wrong you know what I mean? I don't like that. I be rushing with the work so I get things wrong...and be forgetting about the most important things and it's the little things.
>
> **Dorothy:** Do you feel like if it wasn't court ordered that you would still wanna come back to school?
>
> **Jacob:** Yeah…I would wanna come back but I don't wanna help them...to help them feel like...oh, we helped him get what he wanted to get, when that's...it's not like that. Cause this was something that I was focusing on.

Jacob says that he is being forced to go back to school due to having a court order. He highlights the challenges that many students that are incarcerated during high school face when they are released from police custody. This includes problems with transitioning back to school, adjusting to course requirements, and earning course credits required to graduate. Jacob describes how rushing to graduate negatively impacted his ability to perform well academically. He challenges the judge's assumption that graduating from high school is an uncomplicated task that simply necessitates hard work. His perception of returning was mitigated by *who* and *how* he was being coerced to re-enroll. When I asked Jacob if he would return to school without a court order, he contended that he had the desire to be in classroom and working toward graduation. He asserts that being court

ordered to re-enroll overshadowed his initial interest in pursuing a diploma after he returned. Jacob underscores how although well-intended, the court order served to be a method for receiving public acknowledgement for saving youth rather than affording returners the dignity of returning, and working toward a high school diploma.

Bacari shared his feelings about returning back to school.

Dorothy: Do you think that it's hard to come back to school?

Bacari: I think now it is...to come back cause I done missed so many credits. I mean, the work is not done but it's the credits which you have to do. I feel like that I won't be able to do it in time enough to graduate on-time so that's why I feel like it's hard if I go back now.

Dorothy: Do you feel like other students when they think about coming back they think it's gonna be hard?

Bacari: Other kids...I mean yeah! It get overwhelming…and once you actually come in here and map it out...and you see what you have to do…and then you say, oh wow...I actually missed alot…and then it's like...and when you start to tell them you're missing like 10+ credits and when a credit is a class…you're like oh! I didn't know I missed all that.

For some students that have been disconnected from the classroom, they may have a higher number of course credits to fulfill that they may not be fully aware. Bacari's comments illustrate how returning back to school is often the first time that many students are informed of their academic grades and ability to matriculate to a diploma. Bacari asserts that it is difficult to return back to school and graduate on-time when there are numerous classes that he has to complete in order to finish with his peers. This realization can be seen as an academic obstacle to students that are contemplating returning even after they have officially enrolled.

Adaptation Strategies For Returning Back to High School

For majority of the students that returned back to school, how they adapted to this

new context was shaped by their type of supportive family and peer networks, strategies for connecting back with school culture and expectations, and their intrinsic motivation. These aspects severed as protective family factors after they returned, but in many ways they were absent when they decided to leave school.

Family and Peer Social Networks

Devon described how his family social network influenced his return.

Dorothy: Did anyone other than like yourself encourage you to come back to school?

Devon: Yeah it was my dad...and my mom too...they were like on me. And I was like...yeah...cause they used to say it when I was younger...but then when I was younger I would feel like I would stay in it {school} forever..and that's why I didn't really take school seriously...and now I'm starting to get older and it's like...dang. I gotta just get this out the way now.

Dorothy: So how long do you think it will take you to finish?

Devon: Umm...me I feel like, I do feel like it will take forever, probably like...not a whole year...but a couple of months...probably till like January...I feel like that's enough...cause I still feel like, I feel like I'm still working like and still trying to like....I'm still going through this lazy problem right now...like a serious lazy problem...like if it wasn't for my parents...I probably wouldn't even like be coming back here...I probably take a year off, and then another year off.

Devon asserts that his parents play a key role in his return back to school. Devon's close relationships with his parents are instrumental in his decision to return. His father came with him to the Re-entry Center. Devon believes that his parents continue to encourage him to perform well academically and graduate. However, family support during the initial re-enrollment process may be short-lived, because returning students are often discouraged by the number of course credits that they will have to complete. Devon suggests that as an older student he views school as a task that he must get "out the way now". Although he is returning to school, he still views the diploma as less of a valuable

commodity. Devon's comments illustrate that he is still negotiating the value that a diploma has in his current state in Roswell. Similar to Devon, Carlos talked about his parents.

> **Dorothy:** Why do you think that your parents were pushing you about getting a diploma and graduating?
>
> **Carlos:** Well…my dad always said that education is first…and he never finished. But he's a really hard worker and everything but he told me like…he's a janitor…and he makes really good money but…he's like, it's not that I wanna do this it's just, this is the only thing that I can do…cause this is what not going to school leads you to…and he's like…I don't mind cleaning cause its really good money but…like…he just tells me like go to school cause its gonna be worth it.

Carlos says that his father instilled in him a positive value of an education, because he did not graduate from high school. Similar to Devon, Carlos lives with his birth parents and has a positive relationship with his father. Taylor & Behnke (2005) defines this as *progressive fathering*, because the students were not fatherless or without a male figure in their life. Having a present father figure is a significant factor for the two male students of color. Their fathers offered them advisement and encouragement to re-enroll back into school. Additionally, Carlos' father served as a *protective family factor* (Laguna, 2004) despite his initial withdrawal from school. Protective family factors are fluid and multidimensional and can be interpreted differently by students at varying stages of adolescence. For Carlos, *protective family factors* were present, but there were not transmitted in a way that was deemed valuable and understood. Although "the transmission of values begins within the context of the family socializing environment" (Garnier et al., 1993, p.94), how this knowledge is received and mitigated by other factors will impact whether students of color that leave school will ultimately return. Mia described how her mother influenced her re-enrollment.

Dorothy: Did anybody help you, like get up in the morning or call you to make sure?

Mia: My mom does, but it was just phases…cause you can call me, but it's up to me if I want to get up.

Dorothy: Yeah.

Mia: On most days I'm kind of lazy honestly. I just don't have the motivation sometimes and sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. It's like an on and off switch.

Mia points out how parent support can assist returners in getting reconnected to their education, but that the student has to take responsibility in meeting that goal. Her mother only plays a role in her re-enrollment, but she had the final say-so on attending school. Her comments demonstrate the daily challenges that returning students have to negotiate when attempting to repurpose themselves in an institution that they were once considered extinct. In comparison to Mia and other students who discussed their supportive parent network, JoQuan implied that family members and peers encouraged him to return.

Dorothy: Did anybody encourage you to come back to school?

JoQuan: Of course...just about everybody I knew...everyone who cared for me everyone who was related to me...my parents, my friends...my brothers...just about everybody.

Dorothy: Why do you think they were like telling you to go back?

JoQuan: It was actually alot of very important reasons...cause you should try to get that finished as soon as possible and you shouldn't wait a long time...because your opportunity shrinks after a while…you just leave them and if you don't take advantage of them while you have them they shrink…and then the tests gets harder and then the jobs get harder to apply for...things like that.

JoQuan believes that he had several supportive networks including his family and peers. He asserts that waiting to finish high school has negative implications for youth, and that they will have fewer options. He also suggests that people who cared for him were

optimistic about his future and encouraged him to re-enroll. Having caring family and peer relationships during the re-enrollment process can assist students that have previously doubted if school was for them. Family and peer support can serve as protective buffers for returning students by providing encouragement and advisement. Coupled with a lack of jobs that are obtainable without a diploma, he considers the disadvantages of not graduating from high school as a primary consideration to why he chose to come back and try again.

Theresa held a different view about the role of parents in returning back to school.

Theresa: You're forcing them to come back to school...and if they don't want to they're not gonna do the work…they are just gonna sign in and sit down and talk to their friends and spend an hour or two on the computer and not do their work. If you're forcing a student to do something and they don't wanna do it then it's not gonna get done.

Dorothy: So you think parents help students?

Theresa: Some parents don't help students, they pressure them and they don't end up doing the work.

Theresa suggested that parents often force students to return back to school after leaving and can prove to be counterproductive. Students that re-enroll may do so because they feel a sense of obligation toward their parents rather than themselves. Adolescent returners may see a "need to reciprocate such commitment, which along with parents' conveying to children that they view school as important may lead children to be motivated in school for parent-oriented reasons" (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012, p.2). Students that lack the intrinsic motivation and desire to graduate from high school will still struggle academically. Her comments underscore the negative role that parental influence can have on returning student's behaviors in the classroom when students lack self-motivation and dedication to graduating. Gonzalez (2002) contends that students that have internal locus of control have

higher rates of contentment when they perform academically, and will feel obligated to continue to achieve their goals. How the student defines and comes to value their education will influence whether they graduate.

Challenges to Altering Daily Routines

The students that I interviewed described how returning back to school required them to alter their daily routines. This was a major challenge for majority of the students, because they had to change peer relationships and personal practices that appeared to inhibit their ability to graduate. Theresa and Merissa commented on how they adapted to being back in the classroom.

> **Theresa:** I don't know...I don't wanna say that I cut them off...cause I just need my space to focus on school and do what I have to. So some of the friends that I used to have now I don't really talk to anymore, or text them anymore...cause they wanna do…they wanna continue to do what they want to do but I don't wanna do that anymore. I wanna finish school and get a diploma and graduate.
>
> **Merissa:** In a way I didn't really have some of the friends I used to in class, and I wouldn't be listening and they would be like passing me notes and all that…and it's kinda like I had to get more serious and take it more serious.

Both Theresa and Merissa said that they had to change the type of peer relationships that they previously had prior to leaving high school. By limiting their interaction with several of their peers, they were able to focus more on school and on graduating without being distracted. Theresa asserts that one of the adaptation strategies that she used was to limit the type and degree of communication that she had with her peers. She acknowledges that her friends were counterproductive toward her new goal of getting a diploma. Given that she was now focusing on school as a priority rather than maintaining peer relationships, Theresa chose to detach herself from others that would inhibit her in finishing school. Similar to Theresa, Merissa mentioned how she had to

change the type of friends that she would normally associate with at school. This required her not to engage in classroom interactions that would distract her from learning.

Merissa had a new commitment to graduating high school, and this required her to be more dedicated and exhibit personal discipline. For Theresa and Merissa, how they were able to adapt to school was influenced by their ability to disconnect themselves from previous peers that were detrimental to reaching graduation.

Bacari discussed how he adapted to a new school routine.

> **Bacari:** I mean....yeah... I'm the guy who like…I can't go nowhere without taking out my phone. I've taken out my phone in front of the principal and get him to say something to me...like I'll have on my hat and I won't take off my hat. I'll have on my hoods. I like slouching in my seat...there's certain things that I'm stuck in doing ever
> since I've been back in school, so I feel like if I go to school, it's gonna be hard for me to do stuff like that...like take off my hat...put your phone away...stop talking…and you know…stop sleeping in class...and then I got accustomed to it. Even though I've been following school rules for a long time, the little bit of time that I wasn't in school...it became a habit. So I feel like it's gonna be hard....going back there.

Bacari's comments underscore how the transitional process for returning youth is mediated by their behavior and actions prior to when they left. He expresses doubt in how he will be able to manage being back in school. This doubt originates from his inability to adjust to the normal routines that were reinforced at school when he was initially attending. Moreover, he highlights how adjusting one's appearance and mannerisms are difficult habits for returning youth to get accustomed to in order to be a "student". Students that re-enroll have to continuously negotiate personal values and orientations with beliefs and practices that are deemed appropriate at school by schools. This can cause returning youth to question their ability to successfully transition back to

the classroom, and then to navigate their new schooling domain. After not being enrolled Bacari, says that he began to harbor certain practices and beliefs that were difficult to remove. This influenced the type of adaptation strategies that he will use when he is back in the classroom.

Luis and Mia also described how they adapted back to school.

> **Luis:** Honestly it is because it's not like my regular routine. I usually just wake up whatever time I wanted. Now I have to like wake up early and actually be punctual. Like I have a problem with that just with my job and I'm actually getting paid so. Coming to school too just, you know for nothing it's kind of hard sometimes.
>
> **Mia:** I had to stop being lazy. Honestly. I had to stop being lazy and get my butt up if I wanted to accomplish, it sounds like my mom's words. Yeah, but that is what I had to do. I had to get my butt up. That was the only way.

Luis highlights how waking up to attend school was a challenge, because his daily routine consisted of sleeping in late. Since re-enrolling back into school, Luis argues that he had to learn how to be punctual. Students that are returning will need to transition between out-of-school to in-school customs and practices that may be incongruent. Flores-Gonzalez's (2002) study of Chicano returners found that many of the students "resolved their conflicting role identities" (p.144) prior to re-enrollment. However, Luis suggests that he was still performing the student role with having to work and that he was attempting to manage these responsibilities rather than it being resolved. Luis' comments show how one's maladjustment to a new routine can be academically harmful to youth even if they are attempting to reconnect with their education. Consequently, Luis expresses that he still questions why he comes to school. He says that sometimes it is difficult to wake up early, because school is often "for nothing". Although Luis is still weighing the value of attending school he is attempting to reach graduation. Mia says that she had to be more committed to

attending and graduating from high school. She argues that she had to adapt to a new school schedule while being self-motivated and goal orientated. By saying that she had to "get my butt up", Mia underscores how one's desire to attend school without the appropriate action will led to empty results.

Rasheed also discussed how he struggled with having to adjust to a new daily routine.

> **Rasheed:** You have to be hungry. And I am hungry you know what I'm saying? Cause I wanna get out of here. I wanna be a lot better than everybody else. I wanna be the best I can be and I know...I'm never gonna reach that limit because I don't have a limit… you know? So when you come here and it's like, you come back… know what you want! You push yourself! You push yourself! You come here…you wake up! You throw yourself out of bed! I rolled out of bed this morning. I woke up…cause I was…I was at home…I was at home doing this stuff till like one in the morning. You know what I'm saying? And I'm…like I look up and I see its 9:30 and I rolled out of bed…like I literally rolled on the floor cause like…that's the only way I'm going to get up. You know what I'm saying? So…you have to, you have to want it. You really have to want it. Just like anything else. You want something go for it. You gotta push yourself.

Similar to Luis and Mia, Rasheed struggled with having to adjust his routine at home when he transitioned back to school. Rasheed mentions that he had to force himself to wake up in the morning. This included him physically throwing himself on the floor as a method for keeping himself motivated and steadfast toward graduating high school. Students that are re-enrolling have to adjust to different norms in various contexts. For Rasheed, he had to question his commitment to the diploma and his motives for wanting to attend. Rasheed asserts that returning youth should exhibit a hunger for their education. Moreover, there should be no boundaries on what students can do when they are pushing themselves to achieve. Although Rasheed was not accustomed to his new schedule after he returned back to school, his motivation to graduate propelled him to adjust and adapt his everyday practices to reach his goal.

School Policy and Re-enrollment

For majority of the students that decided to re-enroll back into school, they were motivated, dedicated, and eager to return to the classroom. However, having the desire to return without following the proper re-enrollment procedure resulted in limited results. Many of the students cited various challenges that they experienced or noticed from their peers that attempted to re-enroll. These factors served to discourage some students from enrolling while making the re-enrollment process tedious and hard to navigate for others. In this section, I describe the complexity of the Roswell Public School's re-enrollment procedure and how students had difficulty fulfilling policy requirements.

Challenges To Obtaining Paperwork To Re-enroll

Several of the students talked about personal struggles and complications in having to obtain the required paperwork necessary to re-enroll. JoQuan compared his experience with other students that have tried to return.

> **Dorothy:** Was it hard for you to get back in school?
>
> **JoQuan:** It was kinda easy because all of that was kinda there. But I know…if it wasn't then it would have been hard...to go to this place and that place in downtown to get your social security number and birth information and bring it here.
>
> **Dorothy:** You think alot of people have a hard time getting the paperwork?
>
> **JoQuan:** Not really...its only hard if you dropped out...if you were going to a school and you stopped going and then you try to re-register then that's the hard part...that's when everything's confusing. But if you're just trying to register then it shouldn't be hard...it should be real easy.
>
> **Dorothy:** Why do you think you have to turn in all the paperwork?
>
> **JoQuan:** I guess it's just like the way it is...just standard procedure...you just have to have the paperwork before anything's allowed.

JoQuan states that his personal experience with re-enrolling back into school was not difficult, because his paperwork was still readily available and assessable at his previous school. Knowing how to navigate these social environments to gather paperwork required to re-enroll can be a vital obstacle for students that are already marginalized by schools. JoQuan asserts that after a student leaves they are left to navigate re-enrollment. The process of obtaining needed documentation for returning back to school can be challenging for youth that are unaware of the proper procedure for actually re-enrolling. Additionally, for students who are uninformed about how to manage government offices to obtain documentation for returning back to school.

However, he argues that registering for high school is not as complex for students that have not previously withdrew from school. He expresses uncertainty for why having what is deemed as proper paperwork is a necessity for returning back to school. Instead, he insists that paperwork can be a barrier to re-entry for youth because without documentation then students are not allowed to return.

> Rasheed suggested that requesting paperwork can be challenging for returning students.
>
> **Dorothy:** Is it difficult to get the paperwork to return back to school?
>
> **Rasheed:** People don't really learn about stuff like that you know? You go to school…people don't teach you things that you need to know for the real world like you know…immunizations and stuff like that and it's like because of that you're not really…unless your parents are telling you these things which they should…but at the same time…most people don't…most parents don't worry about stuff like that because they feel like the educational system supposed to teach…that's what it's for you know? So they don't know about this. They don't know. They don't know. And then, it takes for something bad…something real world to happen for them to…wake up and be like, oh! Wait I need this you know?

Rasheed says that there is a gap between what students are educated about and what role that parents and schools play in informing youth about the re-entry process. Rasheed argues that parents believe that schools are educating their children for the real world including how to navigate out-of-school contexts as they transition to adulthood. Rasheed places responsibility on the school system and on parents to inform students of all options at their disposal. This includes preparing them to be informed about how to obtain resources and information that will be useful to their transition after high school. By not educating youth on how to maneuver and manage government institutions, he asserts that students are not being adequately prepared to enter into society. Jacob described the process of re-enrollment.

> **Dorothy:** Is it hard for someone to re-enroll back into school?
>
> **Jacob:** Probably so if they lost touch with school and with all their stuff that you have to have. They probably thought...I don't need none of that stuff you know? And then when they go back they...they really do need it when they went ahead and threw it away.
>
> **Dorothy:** Would you change anything?
>
> **Jacob:** Well I mean if the kid is just trying to come back to school, they should just be able to give their name and their student number and they can go from there because everything should be in the computer they shouldn't have to bring nothing in. To give your first and last name and their student number and they should be able to look up everything.

Re-enrolling back into school is often a complex and incoherent process. Jacob contends that the process of re-enrolling is difficult for students that have been disconnected from school. He says that students who leave may believe that their documentation from school has limited long-term value. Therefore, they may disregard school related paperwork that can be useful during the re- enrollment process. For students that are attempting to return

to school, they may not be fully aware of the requirement to return prior to leaving and during re-entry. His comments underscore the gap between what students may perceive as hidden knowledge, and what schools describe as an open information system. However, for youth that come back to school they often discover that there is paperwork that is required for re-entry is often disposed, and requires them to repeat the entire registration process to return. Alterative re-enrollment methods would enable students to return without policy serving as an obstacle to their re-entry.

Merissa expressed concern about the district's re-enrollment policy.

> **Merissa:** Age limit I guess…cause I think there is an age limit. Like 22 or something and you can't come back. So then it's difficult if you had alot of...some people circumstances are really difficult you know? They have to leave school, they have to go take care of things and they can't come back and then when they finally can or finally have the motivation to then....you know…oh no you can't you're too old.

Merissa's comments highlight how age can be an obstacle for older students that are choosing to return back to the classroom. In general, these students age out of the system and become ineligible to attend a public school in Roswell. The age limit is put in place, because the district's policy has deemed twenty two years of age to be a sufficient time that a child should transition outside of school. Still, Merissa believes that students leave school for unique reasons that are individualized yet interconnected. She says that regardless of the student's circumstances within out-of-school and in-school contexts, that some youth have no alternative but to leave. Regardless of the reason, students that are attempting to re-enroll are then penalized academically. Merissa suggests that when older aged students decide to return to school and have self-motivation, their age works to their disadvantage. Theresa also spoke about re-enrollment.

Dorothy: Do you think coming back to school all the paperwork is hard to get?

Theresa: Yes! It's unnecessary things. I think it's a waste of time honestly.

Dorothy: Why you say that?

Theresa: Cause it's like you're trying to go back to school but then their asking you for all this paperwork...and some paperwork you don't even have...let's say for instance you get locked up and you're in like 9th grade you try to go back to school and you get out when you're in like 11th grade but then they ask you for an ID…but you don't know...you don't know this stuff.

Dorothy: What about proof of where you stay is it hard to get?

Theresa: Yeah.

Dorothy: Why?

Theresa: Cause some students may not live with their birth parents they might live with their grandparents, aunts, uncles.

In comparison to other students, Theresa argues that many youth have limited knowhow for the process of getting the proper identification and other policy requirements. She integrates how schools can require paperwork from students that may not be assessable to them or only received through privileged information. There is a high level of uncertainty about the utility of having re- enrollment paperwork, because the purpose of this policy requirement has not been effectively transmitted to students. Instead, many returners are simply left to question the re-entry process, and often are left without a response. Additionally, Theresa says that having proof of residence to re-enroll back into school is problematic for youth. Students that are mobile in out-of-school settings will move from house to house during the school year. They may live with family members or peers that are not classified as a parent and/or guardian. Still, the re-enrollment policy requires students to prove residency papers with their name on the mortgage or lease. For students

that have no permanent residence, they are placed at a higher risk of not being able to return to high school for a diploma.

Devon explained his personal experience trying to return back to school.

Dorothy: So how many times did you have to come to turn all that it?

Devon: I think it was like three or four times back and forth.

Dorothy: How did that make you feel to have to come three or four times?

Devon: Yeah. That was getting kinda discouraging. that...that alone was about to make me like...oh..alright. I'm out of here {laughs}. I'm like man...what is this? What is this? Yeah…its little things like that that can make it be like....do this...don't do this...just have your parents sign this…and I'm like...I'm 20 years old! It's not like 18...it's like 18 when you don't need your parents to sign anything right? Like...I gotta do all this and if you don't have it it's like…I can't start? It's not that serious.

Another concern raised by Devon is the variation in time commitment that is required to re- enroll. Flores-Gonzalez's (2002) study of returners suggests that youth were reinstated as students fairly quickly. However, Devon did not have a similar experience. He faced several obstacles when he was trying to re-enroll, because he had to transition numerous times to the Re- entry Center. Devon describes the experience as "discouraging". Students that are attempting to return may become disheartened if they have to shift between various places to officially re- enroll. Their motivation may be short lived, because having to navigate re-enrollment procedures can be counterintuitive. Devon also points out how as an older student he has to have his parent's signatures for re-entry. For students that are disconnected from their parents or that are mobile, obtaining their permission may act as a policy obstacle rather than assisting in making the process more systemic. Bacari discussed his experience re-enrolling.

Bacari: You come in...and you sign in on the yellow folder and you just put down the information...all the information that you need to fill out and then that's it…and then they'll get you signed up on the computer that same day…not even an

hour…probably only 30minutes.

The degree of support and the amount of access to information about the re-enrollment process that students have directly impacts how they will experience returning. In contrast to Devon who had to transition numerous times to obtain documentation that is required to re-enroll, Bacari suggests that he provided his personal information, and was able to return back to school the same day. In Bacari's case, he was able to start an online credit recovery program prior to his subsequent placement at a public school. Devon had a dramatically different experience than Bacari due to having more knowledge about the policy process.

Conclusion

Returning to school was a critical first step that many of the students willingly decided to take in order to continue their pursuit of a diploma. Consequently, the students described their return and subsequent re-enrollment process as mystified, taxing, and uncertain. As they returned back to the classroom, the students had to navigate racial and gendered stereotypes, a new school culture, and social identity threat. Their management of social identity threat was dependent on how they perceived of and placed value on their identity as Black and Hispanic urban youth of color. Many of the students expressed frustration with having to distance themselves from negative "dropout" stigmas that followed them as they entered back into school. The students also suggested that they encountered gender stereotypes that were hyper-sexualized for female youth. Male returners were subjected to more pessimistic notions about their academic achievement and intelligence in the classroom. The students' ability to navigate these factors influenced their decision to return back to school.

Several of the youth suggested that returning required self-motivation, willpower, and supportive family and peer networks as they transitioned back to the classroom. School was once a space of rejection and exclusion, but now served to be a site for academic growth, perseverance, and adolescent development. The students had to alter their mindset about school. They had to re-evaluate the diploma and see it as a credential rather than as a penalty. Returning back to school was a chance for the students to prove to their peers, educators, and the institution of school that they were worth getting an education. The dominant discourse in educational research is that urban students of color leave school never to return. However, the narratives of these students underscore the challenges of returning, resources necessary to foster their re- engagement, and that they are not easily dispensable. The desire to return to school will be short lived if youth face insurmountable barriers during the re-enrollment process.

Many of the students highlighted how the district's re-enrollment policy was a legalized method for sorting out returning students of color. Returning back to the classroom became more about following standard procedures than promoting the re-entry and academic success of students that have been marginalized by schools. Graduating simply remains reserved for a select group of youth that remain in school, or that are able to decipher the logistics of the policy process. How youth engage with policy influences their identity as students and adolescents of color during re-entry, and how they will define achievement in their newly defined student role. The student's voices illustrate ways that schools and policymakers shape *who* graduates high school, and the role of policy in creating stumbling blocks for youth that are only seeking a second change at graduating high school.

CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

> *"I've you know, come to learn that it really isn't dropping out. There are main reasons why young people leave and I think when we just use the term 'dropout' we're never gonna get to the root of the problem or we really don't understand why it is they've left. And having said that, you know they haven't dropped out. They actually legitimately may have walked out of the door, because they didn't receive the things they needed socially, emotionally, academically…just everyday needs that people need to be able to face the issues that they have to face, and I think that…you know…pretty much that's what we see here at the Center with this work".*
>
> -Head Master Re-entry Center

Introduction

The Head Master's comments underscore how the term "dropout" has been a misnomer. The act of leaving school has numerous underlying causes that have yet to be fully explored and challenged. Students that are labeled as "dropouts" are presumed to be making an irrational decision that is unmerited. However, the Head Master's statement highlights how youth that exit school often have legitimate reasons, because they are experiencing a deficiency at school that has drained them emotionally and psychologically. Leaving is not an act of shame but a way to gain freedom from neglect. When students are not having their basic educational needs met then early school withdrawal seems more of a viable alternative. Schools are perceived as "great social equalizers", but this ideal may be more of a myth than a reality for many of the students that are being served at the Re-entry Center.

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the individual, school, and neighborhood characteristics of returning Black and Hispanic urban youth while describing factors that shaped how students were able to navigate the cultural and behavioral expectations of these contexts. I used a sequential explanatory mixed methods design to gain a more in-depth understanding of how urban students of color conceptualize and come

to value the high school diploma. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design allowed me to use multiple methodologies for examining the multifaceted nature of a phenomenon (Buck et al., 2009). This study highlights the utility of student voice as an instrument for exposing systematic gaps to reaching graduation for non-White students, challenging mainstream notions of achievement, and to foster academic success for Black and Hispanic students that reside in at-risk environments.

Students that leave school have been classified as "dropouts" who exit permanently (Lessard et al., 2008; Ou, 2008) without consideration to the underlying in-school and out-of-school causes of their departure or challenges to their return. Using quantitative and qualitative methods allowed me to examine the characteristics of youth that are re-enrolling back into school in a district level recovery program while highlighting adaptation strategies of returning students.First, I used Cross-Classified Hierarchical Linear Modeling to analyze how student, school, and neighborhood factors shape re-enrollment in an urban school district. Second, I conducted a Multiple Case Study of sixteen Black and Hispanic youth to understand how they transitioned between their neighborhood and school while negotiating being a "student" again. In the following sections I describe the study's findings, implications, and directions for future research.

Summary of Study Findings

This study sought to understand, and depict the experiences of urban students of color that are navigating early school withdrawal, and that are transitioning back to school. The results of this study have illuminated the voices of urban students of color who have been marginalized by the institution of education, exclusionary practices implemented by various school actors, and out-of-school conditions that have inhibited their pathway to a graduation.

Despite the multifaceted, interconnected, and intricate circumstances that they negotiated on a daily basis, returning back to school required students to experience life and enter into the real world without a diploma.

The narratives of the students that I interviewed underscore the role of adult relationships in out-of-school and in-school contexts in shaping how students defined, interpreted, and chose to exit the classroom. This included relationships with parents, teachers, and guidance counselors at school. How the adults communicated and interacted with students through spotlighting, verbal confrontations, and unstable relationships made many of the students feel socially excluded and unsupported academically. Moreover, several students expressed frustration with role performance anxiety. Having to cope with and perform the "student" role with the "parent" or "employee" role made their focus on school more challenging and less rewarding. Many of the students were transitioning between social institutions of the neighborhood and school that were contradictory and toxic to their academic performance.

The findings also indicate that returning back to high school required the students to revalue a diploma and to change how they understood, interpreted, and conceptualized education in their lives. For the students that I interviewed, returning back to school was racialized and gendered, but could not be achieved without supportive family and peer networks, altering their daily routine, and navigating school policy requirements. Viewing the act of returning back to school as racialized reveals how race acted as a negative stigma for urban youth of color. The students described how social identity threat followed them when they re-enrolled, because of the permanency that racial stereotypes has in how Black and Hispanic urban youth are educated and mis-educated. For example, majority of the Black

students discussed how media and societal views shape the identities that they are prescribed despite their acceptance or noncompliance. In comparison, the Hispanic students contended that females were sexualized and adultified in ways that were impure and not feminine. In terms of gender, majority of the students believed that it is easier for female students to return back to school, because male students of color had to cope with more punitive stereotypes.

Additionally, the study indicates that a combination of supportive family and peer networks, and altering one's regular routine are instrumental for returning youth. It is not enough to have a robust social network if the individuals that are closest to students are not people that they trust or have positive relationships. Regardless of the fact that many of the individuals in the student's initial social network was the same prior to leaving school, these individuals began to serve a more significant role in their return. There was a higher level of encouragement and motivation from their family and peers that helped to propel the students to re-enroll back into school. However, having additional support was not the only factor that shaped their return. Many of the students underscored the challenges of transitioning to adulthood by having to adapt to a new schedule. Given that the students were not enrolled in school from a week to several years, there were certain habits and mannerisms that they had to adapt to in order to assume to the "student" role again. This was challenging for them, because they had to adhere to certain practices and customs that they were not accustomed but had to immediately acquire and navigate in order to survive.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The findings of Phase I and Phase II of this study indicated that how students transitioned between their neighborhood and school and their subsequent navigation when they returned was individualized, intricate, and dependant on various in-school and out-of-school relationships.

Finding 1: Race Matters in Returning

Although Phase I shows that Black youth were more likely to return, many of the Black students that I interviewed in Phase II faced comparable circumstances in their neighborhood and at school that became barriers to them reaching graduation. For example, results from the Multiple Case Study demonstrated how many of the Hispanic students were more likely to have employment during high school, and encountered more role performance anxiety than their Black counterparts. Despite many of the Black students having to perform multiple roles as parents and employees when I interviewed the Hispanic students in Phase II they expressed more of an intense emotional burden. Coupled with having a higher sense of family obligation to financially support themselves or their parents, the Hispanic youth articulated higher levels of responsibility to manage and support their siblings, parents, and household. This made being a "student" more difficult. Although the Black students suggested that they faced various racial stereotypes and social identity threat, many of the Hispanic students believed that race had limited value in how they would be perceived by others when returning back to school. This may have impacted how they then coped with returning.

Finding 2: Returning is Gendered

Phase I also indicated that returning is gendered, and that female youth are more likely to re-enroll. Phase II of the study revealed how students conceptualized the role of gender, and highlights factors that they argue foster the re-enrollment of female students. During interviews in Phase II, several students suggested that schools are structured in ways that promote gender inequality because it caters to the learning and teaching needs of girls. One student argued that girls are smarter than their male counterparts. However, many of the students contended that female returners were more sexualized by peers and were viewed

more negatively in the classroom. Girls that left high school were suspected to have became pregnant, were considered a "ho" at school or were promiscuous outside of school. Female returners were subjected to more verbal assaults about their appearance or sexual activity, while males were deemed as not being academically inclined to succeed in school long-term.

Finding 3: Students in Earlier Grades Are Less Likely to Re-enroll

Students that returned were less likely to have recently started high school. The study's findings from Phase I suggest that youth in later grades were more likely to return in comparison to their counterparts. The average grade of the students that I interviewed is approximately the second semester of their 10th grade year. These students asserted that when they returned back to school that they were concerned about how to complete multiple courses in various subjects. Although several of the students were classified as 10th graders, many of them had failed numerous courses and became overage for their grade. For example, one student that I interviewed in Phase II was 20 years old in the 9th grade. In comparison, another student was in 12th grade and was 20 years old. Regardless of the grade that the student is in, how many classes that they earned toward their diploma is another factor that may play a key role in early school withdrawal and re-enrollment.

Finding 4:School and Neighborhood Factors Influence Re-enrollment

Returning is in many ways influenced by the type of interpersonal relationships and peer culture that urban youth of color to negotiate at school. Another finding from this study is that school factors influence re-enrollment. This included the structural arrangements, power dynamics, and caring that returning youth had at school. Phase I findings show that students who attend a traditional school prior to leaving are more likely to re-enroll. Additionally, a school's graduation rate did not influence returning. In Phase II, both the Black

and Hispanic students argued that the context of school impacted how they perceived of the diploma. How the students were able to navigate relationships with peers and adults shaped their experiences at school during their exit and in their return. The students suggested that adult use of authority and verbal confrontations created environments that were socially exclusionary. The student's ability to fit-in with their peers was another in-school factor that impacted how they conceptualized school. Moreover, the quantitative data indicated that living in a neighborhood zone did not influence re-enrollment. Still, the students' narratives indicate that their community did impact how they initially felt about school and it was a critical factor in why they left.

Therefore, living within a certain neighborhood zone may not be as significant as how students negotiated the community context including unstable adult relationships and employment. The students' ability to cope with these out-of-school stressors and daily hassles ultimately shaped their motivation and self-determination to return back to the classroom.

Finding 5: Re-enrollment Policy Creates Barriers to Entry

Another consideration is how the institution of school served to systematically exclude Black and Hispanic youth through the district's re-enrollment policy. Many of the students expressed discontentment, rejection, and frustration with the process of re-enrolling back into school. Several students suggested that returning in school was difficult, because they have to navigate various social institutions to obtain the proper documentation required to re-enroll. The students were unaware of the proper channels to gather paperwork and lacked personal identification and immunization records required to return. For students that were over 18 years old, they still had to obtain their parent and/or guardian signature to return. This was challenging for students that live outside of the home, that are homeless, or that lack a permanent residence. Although school policy can act as a method for creating uniformity and

standard procedures, it can also serve as a barrier that students have to navigate successfully in order to regain the student status. Students that lack the necessary resources, time commitment, and information required to re-enroll were discouraged from the re-entry process.

Study Implications

This study has implications for educators, schools, policymakers, and educational research. First, the field of education should embrace the counterstories of urban students of color that are often the most marginalized by schools and excluded from the diploma. This requires educators and researchers to foster dialogue between students and school staff in an environment that encourages their voices rather than dismisses them as being insignificant. Solórzano & Yosso (2002) defines *counterstories* "a method of telling stories of those people whose experiences are not often; a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p.32). *Counterstories* have been used in educational research to uncover the narratives of students of color that are marginalized by various social institutions including K-12 schools and actors within them. The voices of urban youth of color are highlighted, humanized, and legitimized (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Stinson, 2008; Yosso, 2006). Students speak to their own experiences in ways that often counter dominant narratives that are prized as valid. Urban youth of color in particular "are racially coded in politics, media, and mainstream narratives as, in the best case scenario at-risk and, at worst, as dangerous threats to society" (Roberts et al., 2008, p.335). Allowing students of color to speak for themselves is significant to understanding their educational reality. Solórzano & Yosso (2002) contend that "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (p.32).

Listening to the experiences of students of color is essential to unmasking systematic and practiced based ways that they are further marginalized in schools.

Implications for Educators

Adult interactions and relationships at school have an invaluable role in whether youth of color become disconnected. Carter (2005) contends that "parents and communities have placed teachers and administrators in charge of their children's minds and lives for a substantial portion of each day" (p. 173). Teachers and guidance counselors are academic informants that steer students to the path toward graduation and their matriculation to college. Consequently, students of color are often subject to *racial microaggressions* that negatively impact their academic performance and ability to obtain a diploma. Sue et al. (2008) describes racial microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environments indignities, whether intentional or unintentional" (p.330). The verbal exchanges and communicative styles that teachers use when interacting with students of color can create hostile classroom environments that led to their exit from school. Moreover, as students of color return, they will have to negotiate previous confrontations with school staff while pursing their education again. How school staff constructs or destroy positive interpersonal relationships with students of color will impact how they perceive of themselves as "students" or "dropouts" in the classroom.

School staff should consider how methods for communicating and interacting with students of color are mediated by microaggressions and subtle forms of exclusion. Sue et al. (2008) contends that *microinsults* and *microinvalidations* are used to exclude and invalidate the experiences of youth of color including their academic, social, emotional, and personal needs. The degree that students receive microinsults and microinvalidations will impact the level of trust and caring that they have with adults in school. By not considering the

background experiences of students of color as valid in the classroom, then school staff negates the individualized narratives that youth bring with them to school. Secondly, guidance counselors should examine how their visible absence in fostering the achievement of underperforming students influences the path to graduation. School counselors play an imperative role in a child's education (Clark & Breman, 2009). However, for students of color that are contemplating remaining in school, they can serve as advocates or as deterrents. The lack of exchanges that guidance counselors have with urban youth that are placed at-risk are as critical to having extensive focus and negative subjection. How authority is defined and enforced by adults in school can also impact graduating. Examining the role of school staff in educating returning urban youth of color is significant to understanding how disenfranchised youth come to define their place in school.

Implications for Schools and Policymakers

The findings of this study indicate that schools and policymakers can play a larger role in the recruitment and retention of youth of color in returning for a diploma. There are various stakeholders involved that have a personal as well as social stake in who is graduating from high school. Urban youth of color that reside in at-risk contexts face numerous policy challenges that influence how they perform academically and their pathway to graduation. Students that leave school and return encounter obstacles that are often not academic related (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). First, schools should consider ways that its structure and policies inhibit youth from returning after they leave by assessing how non-educational factors impact student learning. The students in the study cited school schedule issues and challenges to navigating the schooling terrain as a returner. Having supportive mechanisms in place for youth in-school can be beneficial to students getting on track and staying on pace to reach

graduation. This includes non-profit or public sector programs that provide child care, counseling, and or information regarding housing in the district. Secondly, there is an apparent gap between how schools and policymakers conceptualize youth that "dropout". By focusing on the act of leaving school as an individualized decision that is not mediated by a complex set of factors, educational institutions are able to further exclude these students. "Dropping out" is then an only alternative rather than a last resort.

Third, schools should assess how their practices and polices systematically exclude and marginalize urban youth prior to their re-entry. For example, many of the students that I interviewed believed that after they left school that schools would not allow they to return. Rather than student's lacking the desire and motivation to come back, they believed that schools made their exit permanent. Schools and policymakers can develop and implement initiatives that address racial and gender disparities in *who* returns and access to returning. This will require educators to foster educational environments that welcome student voice through the use of qualitative methods and quantitative district level data. Schools and policymakers can create innovative ways for allowing students and community members to have open dialogue about graduation rates and methods for increasing student connectiveness to their education. These strategies can help to foster an educational environment that understands students' backgrounds and develops programmatic tools that give all youth a chance to graduate high school.

Implications for Educational Research

The current face of high school dropout research has changed. Many of the students that have left school are now choosing to return back to classrooms around the country. However, their decision to return will be short lived if there is a lack of programs that provide supportive measures to urban youth of color to encourage their re-enrollment and

sustainability in high school. One consideration is for educational researchers to examine ways that teachers, administrators, and school staff promote deficit-oriented thinking about urban students of color that are returning. This study indicates that the schooling context is a new space for students that have been disconnected from the classroom. Returning youth will have to re-negotiate being a student again. This can be challenging for at-risk urban students that have been absent from the classroom for several months to years. Second, traditional concepts of resiliency negates how students actively navigate various in-school and out-of-school contexts simultaneously. Creasey & Jarvis (2013) argue that individual factors that led to resiliency are under-researched for urban students of color. Examining resiliency is urban contexts is imperative in educational research, because it can serve as a protective factor between social stress and affirming outcomes (Creasey & Jarvis, 2013). The students in the study demonstrate how resiliency is not a single act but a process that occurs over an undetermined period of time. Their resiliency was not evident in their initial withdrawal from school but in their return. However, if educational research continues to examine certain points of the educational process without consideration to the pathways that youth engage after leaving then only a small portion of their stories are being told.

Third, Critical Race Theory should be used as an analytical tool for examining how urban students of color experience early school withdrawal and re-enrollment. Although this study does not foreground race, the students' narratives reveal how race is a mediating factor. Two tenets of Critical Race Theory can be utilized to provide context to the how institutionalized practices and policies shape the educational experiences of returning Black and Hispanic urban youth. Stovall (2006) contends that one tenet of Critical Race Theory is to "expose and deconstruct seemingly colorblind or race neutral policies and practices which entrench the disparate treatment of people of non-White persons" (p.244). Exploring re-

enrollment policies and practices in urban schools can expand current research on ways that youth are alienated by colorblind initiatives that promote racial inequalities. Additionally, Stovall (2006) argues that Critical Race Theory seeks to "legitimize and promote the voices and narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them" (p.244). The legitimization of the narratives of returning Black and Hispanic youth will shed light to the various ways that students navigate high school.

Directions for Future Research

There are several implications for the field of education that can be used to inform directions for future research. Future research should consider how the intersection of race, gender, and social class influences how returning urban youth define academic success and the high school diploma. Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall (2013) argue that intersectionality theory has an "insistence on examining the dynamics of difference and sameness has played a major role in facilitating consideration of gender, race, and other axes of power in a wide range of political discussions and academic disciplines" (p.787). Understanding how identity is socially constructed and shaped by structural and systematic inequalities in education underscores the role of anti-essentialism of an individual's experience as a single experience. For example, the experiences of a Black male student that resides in a middle income community will be vastly different than a living in a low-income neighborhood. Additionally, examining the experiences of Black and Hispanic immigrant children. Highlighting these experiences as individualized and complex will reveal how students come to embrace or detach from the classroom. Another future direction for research is to explore how in-school teachers shape the re- enrollment experiences of returning urban youth, and how pre-service teachers conceptualize dropout recovery. Bridgeland's (2010) study reports that "teachers overwhelmingly showed strong support for reforms to increase high school graduation rates, such as alternative learning

environments, reducing class size, putting in place early warning systems to identify students who needed extra supports, connecting classroom learning to real-world experiences such as service learning, and increasing school's parental outreach programs" (p. 106). However, reforming schools without teacher's beliefs and orientations about urban students of color will led to dismal improvements. Educators have "racial biases, expectations, and preferences of which they are often unaware" (Atwater, 2008, p.246) that impact their engagement with Black and Hispanic youth in the classroom. Exploring the root causes of these biases will provide context to how power dynamics between students and teachers ultimately play out in schools.

Third, future research should examine how Black and Hispanic urban youth that leave school due to discipline policies experience early school withdrawal, and the adaption strategies that they use to transition back to school. Skiba et al. (2011) argues that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be disciplined in comparison to their White counterparts despite the type of infraction committed. Students that are suspended or expelled from school have a unique experience that will be different for youth that leave based on academic reasons or out-of-school factors. In comparison to other students, youth disciplined under certain policies will have certain perspectives on the schooling process and their withdrawal from school since it will not be by choice. Moreover, "schools tend to rely heavily on exclusion from the classroom as the primary discipline strategy, and this practice often has a disproportionate impact on Black, Latino, and American Indian students" (Gregory et al., 2010, p.59). Exploring how these students conceptualize the diploma prior to and after their suspension or exclusion can provide insight to the various ways that schools institutionalize early school withdrawal while discouraging re-enrollment.

Conclusion

This study uncovers the *counterstories* and diverse experiences of urban youth of color that left high school and returned. For many of the students, a combination of out-of-school factors and in-school experiences created the appearance that the diploma was an obstacle rather than an immediate reward. This altered students' intrinsic motivation to attend school, but was also a critical factor that led to their return. Still, regardless of the neighborhood environments and schooling contexts that the students had to navigate they all possessed a keen interest in graduating with a high school diploma rather than a G.E.D. Prior to leaving the classroom, many of the students believed that school was not a space for learning and growing as human beings, but was a place of rejection, isolation, and avoidance. The students had to re-conceptualize the diploma as an incentive, but they still perceived school to be a wasted institution that had defiled them as students. Their ability to now negotiate being a "student" now will impact whether they will remain re-enrolled after returning.

Students' experiences in out-of-school contexts impacted their *focus* on school, but not the *value* that they placed on getting a diploma. Many of the students wanted to believe that school was a place that they should be. They wanted to feel accepted, validated, and humanized by their teachers, school staff, and other students. Comparatively, the students expressed a desire to feel a sense of connection and belonging in their neighborhood from their parents, community members, and peer groups. However, the complex and distinctly different lives that they lived outside of school made being an adolescent and a student impossible to perform. This study illustrates that while youth are "students" in the classroom the out-of-school environments that they encounter often position them to live and perform as "adults". This positioning that urban youth of color have in school and in their neighborhood

collectively impacts their pathway to graduate and in whether they leave, stay, or walk away from school only to return and try again. Schools and policymakers have a responsibility to develop innovative ways that promote the academic achievement and engagement of students of color in the classroom. Otherwise, school practices and policies will continue to serve as barriers to the diploma for urban youth of color.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Neighrohood Zones in District

Figure 5: Neighborhood Zones in District

Appendix B: Cross-Classified HGLM List

Table 7: Cross-Classified HGLM List

CATEGORICAL LEVEL	VARIABLE NAME	VARIABLE VALUES
STUDENT (1ST LEVEL)	*RACE*	Black=0 Hispanic=1
	GENDER	Male=0 Female=1
	AGE (continuous variable)	15=1, 16=2, 17=3, 18=4, 19=5, 20=6, 21=7
	GRADE (categorical variable)	7th grade=1, 8th grade=2, 9th grade=3, 10th grade=4, 11th grade=5, 12th grade=6
	SPED CODE	NO=0 YES=1
SCHOOL (2ND LEVEL)	*SCHOOLTY*	TRADITIONAL=0 ALTERNATIVE= 1
	SCHOOLGR (continuous variable)	Ranges from 13%=1…x…x.. to 98.7%= 32
NEIGHBORHOOD (3RD LEVEL)	*ZONE*	NORTH=1 EAST=2 WEST=3

Appendix C: Student Interview Questions

Student Interview Questions

Student Background and Prior Schooling Experiences

1. What do you prefer to be called?
2. How old are you?
3. What grade are you in?
4. Where did you grow up?
5. Can I ask you about your living situation?
   a. Do you live with your parents?
   b. How many siblings do you have?
6. Do you think your family is low income, working class, middle income, or high income?
7. How would your friends outside of school describe you?
   a. Were you popular at your prior school before dropping out?
   b. What would teachers or adults at school say about you at your previous school?
8. How would you describe yourself?

Dropping Out of Previous School

1. Why did you drop out of your previous school?
2. How long were you out of school?
3. How would you describe your previous school?
   a. Students?
   b. Teachers?
   c. School Staff?
   d. Principal?
4. Describe what you think is the purpose of school.
5. Did you participate in any afterschool activities?
6. What was the influence of your peers in your decision to dropout?
   a. Your family?
   b. Your teachers?
   c. Administration?
7. Do you think others considered you a “good” student?
   a. Define a “good” student
   b. Was school a priority to you?
   c. Was school a priority to your friends?
   d. To your parents?
   e. Would teachers say that you are successful?
   f. Your friends?
8. What did you do while you were not enrolled in school?

a. Did you get a job?
b. Hang out with friends?
c. Stay at home?
d. Volunteer?
e. Still go to school?

9. When you dropped out of school, did you think you would come back?
10. Did something happen to you that encouraged you to go back to school?
    a. Something happen to someone in your family?
    b. In your community?
    c. At school?

Re-enrolling

1. Why did you re-enroll in school?
2. How did you hear about the Re-engagement Center?
3. Describe how you felt coming to the center for the first time to return to school. What emotions did you have?
4. Was the process of returning to school difficult?
    a. Completing paperwork?
    b. Picking a school?
    c. Test requirements for school?
5. Describe how you felt when you first left the center. What emotions did you have?
    a. How did your parent respond?
    b. Friends?
    c. Community?
6. Do you think that your previous teachers in high school would want you to re-enroll?
    a. Administration?
    b. Friends?
7. How did you choose the type of school to return to?
    a. Traditional public school?
    b. Alternative public school?
    c. Distance
    d. Student Racial composition
    e. Teachers?
    f. Administration?
    g. Friends/peers current students?
8. Did anyone outside of the Re-engagement Center help you to return to school?
9. After coming to the center to re-enroll did anyone try to change your mind?
10. Did you initially think it would be hard to re-enroll?
11. Did you visit any of the schools before you re-enrolled?
12. Did you know any of the teachers?
    a. Administration?
    b. Students?

13. Did you have to take a placement test to re-enroll?
    a. How did you feel about this process?
    b. Was it difficult to study?
    c. Did you have materials?
    d. Did someone help you?
14. How many classes did you pass prior to re-enrolling?
15. How many classes did you need to graduate?
16. Did you know your GPA?
17. Did you feel nervous academically?
18. Did you feel that you needed to change who you are to re-enroll?
    a. Who you hung around?
    b. What you did in your free time?
    c. Where you worked?
    d. Was this difficult for you?
19. Did you get placed in the first school of your choice?
    a. Why or why not?
20. Describe your first day back in school.

<u>After Re-enrollment</u>

1. How has school been going for you now?
2. What are some of the supports you have now that you did not have before at school?
    a. Teachers?
    b. Administration?
    c. Friends?
    d. Home/Parent?
3. Have your friends changed since re-enrolling?
4. How would you describe your family life now?
5. Was there anything that changed in your life since re-enrolling?
6. Describe the relationship between you and your former friends.
    a. Are they still your friends now?
    b. Do you have new friends?
    c. Do you spend less time with them?
7. How have students at school reacted to you re-enrolling?
    a. Do you feel apart of school?
    b. Do you feel excluded from school?
8. What do you think is the purpose of school now?
    a. Has your perspective changed since re-enrolling?
    b. Has anyone helped you with school? Academics?
    c. Has anyone helped you with socially engaging in school?
9. Have your parents helped you with re-enrolling?
10. Have your parents helped you to stay focused on staying in school?
11. Have your teachers' attitudes changed at while at your new school?

a. How?
12. Describe three things that you feel have made a difference in you staying in school now.
13. Describe three things that you feel still encourage you to leave school.
14. How do you deal with people that encourage you to leave school?
    a. Friends?
    b. Parents?
    c. Community?
    d. Teachers?
    e. Administration?
    f. School Staff?
15. Are there any additional pressures that make you want to leave school?
16. How do you deal with these pressures?
    a. How does that make you feel?
17. Is it easier to resist them next time?
18. Did you know that you could come back to school?
    a. Why or why not?
    b. Who told you?
19. Do you have any more comments for me?

<u>Experiences in School</u>

1. How is school going?
2. How are your grades?
3. Do you feel that you are improving academically?
4. Do you feel socially accepted in school?
5 Are there any pressures that have occurred lately?
6. How do you deal with them?
7. How would you describe school?
8. How would you describe your relationship with your teachers?
    a. Administration?
    b. School staff?
9. How would you describe your relationship with your friends?
    a. Former friends?
    b. New friends?
10. Are there times that you feel alone in this?
11. Have there been any additional supports for you to stay in school?
12. Do you come back to the Re-engagement Center for help for anything?
13. Describe how you felt after receiving your last test or grade in a class.
    a. How did the teacher react?

b. Did you tell anyone?
    i. Friends?
    ii. Parent?
    iii. Another school staff member?
14. Have you joined any local organizations or clubs?
    a. What is that experience like?
15. Have you looked into going to college?
    a. What type?
    b. What major?
    c. When?
16. Has anything happened to any of your friends that have influenced staying in school?
17. Has anything happened to any of your family that has influenced staying in school?
18. Has anything major happened in your life that is affecting school?
19. What are your plans for the future?
20. How would you describe what it takes for a student to re-enroll in school?
    a. Paperwork?
    b. Testing?
    c. Courage to come back?
21. What would you say to someone that wants to come back but doesn't know how?
22. What would you say to teachers to help students return to school?
    a. Administrators?
    b. School Staff?
    c. Counselors?
23. Would you change anything about policies for students that want to return?
24. Would you change anything about your current school?
    a. Previous school?
    b. Teachers?
    c. Administration?
    d. School staff?
    e. Counselors?
25. Do you have any more comments for me?

Appendix D: Child Assent and Parental Permission Form

Child Assent and Parental Permission Form
Under 18 Years of Age

Participant Contact Information

Name:	Current School:	Date:
Interview Number:	Interviewer:	

Researcher and Title:
Dorothy Hines, Graduate Student

Department and Institution
Education Policy, MSU

Address and Contact Information:
620 Farm Lane
358 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48823

Principal Investigator
Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews
Associate Professor, MSU

Study Title:
Navigating Multiple Worlds When Dropping Back In School: Urban Youth, School Policy and Re-enrollment

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I. Research Purpose:
The intent of this project is to examine how students that leave high school return for a diploma. This research collects data on how students transition back to the district while balancing family, school, and policy expectations. This project is a dissertation and will be used for academic purposes and results of this study will be provided to the program. Selected participants for the study will provide insight to how students returning to high school for a diploma can be better served academically by teachers, principals, and school staff. This study will take place over a two year period. Selected participants will be interviewed over a four month period for 1.5hours each interview. Interviews will total 9 hours for each participant. Participants under the age of 18 require parental permission to participate.

II. What You Will Do:
To participate in the study your child will have to agree to be interviewed for a 1.5 hour period at a Boston Public Schools location and you will have to provide parental permission for them to be an interviewee. Research is being collected from your child about their experiences re-enrolling in the district after leaving school without a high school diploma. Your child will not be required to stay for an interview session longer than the 1.5 hour timeframe or have to pay a cost to participate. Your child will be interviewed a total of 9 hours or 6 sessions throughout a four month period. Each session your child will be asked questions about how they have adjusted to being back in school and provide updates on any school, personal, or community changes that are impacting staying in school. Your child will be audio-recorded and provided with findings of the study by request. Your child can not participate in the study if you and your child do not

consent to them being audio-recorded. Voice recordings will be provided to your child for confirmation if requested. To participate in this study we are asking your child to be interviewed in six sessions and for access their academic records. If your child is unable to attend in person follow-up interviews at an approved Boston Public Schools location, a follow-up interview will be conducted by telephone.

III. Individual Consent:

To participate your child will be required to have parental consent and individual consent. As a participant in this dissertation study, the researcher will obtain data through interviews and use district level information about your child's schooling. Interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for accuracy. Your child's participation in this study requires audio-taping and is mandatory. Your child can not participate in the study without consent to be auto-recorded. If your child is unable to attend in person follow-up interviews at an approved Boston Public Schools location, a follow-up interview will be conducted by telephone. Additional information collected may involve participants' previous dropout history, previous school attendance, current school attendance, student grades, and MCAS Scores. Participants' parental and individual consent to these interviews permits access from Boston Public Schools for this data.

IV. Potential Benefits

Participating in this dissertation study will provide your child a space for sharing narratives and experiences re-enrolling in the district. Your child's participation in this study may contribute to how schools are able to serve students that return to high school for a diploma.

V. Potential Risks

As an interviewee, there are no foreseeable physical risks associated for your child. However, there may be questions that are perceived to be sensitive or may cause discomfort about participants' experiences after leaving high school. Given this risk, it is imperative that your child share with the researcher any known distressful situations that emerge. Interviewees are not required to complete all interviews and your child has the right to no longer participate in the study without penalty.

VI. Privacy and Confidentiality:

Information provided as a part of this dissertation will be confidential as expressed within the context of this research project. Your child's confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extend allowable by law. Data collected will not be shared with parent and/or guardian unless reasonable instances of harm or risk are communicated during the interview process. Data recorded will be transcribed and kept at the Boston Public Schools Re-engagement Center in a locked cabinet to ensure data is not accessible to outside parties. Data will be kept at the Re-engagement Center for a period of five months. After the data collection is complete information kept at the Boston Public Schools Re-engagement Center will be transferred to Michigan State University for analysis and transcription. References to individual comments made by participants will not be disclosed by name or school affiliation. Interview data will not be available to teachers, schools, or principals which directly conceals participant name, address, and parent and/or guardian information. Access to data collected will be available to the researcher, advisor, and IRB at Michigan State University. The information obtained will be utilized for research-based purposes including completion of dissertation requirements,

conference presentation, program evaluation, and/or publication. To ensure the fidelity of this dissertation study, the research acquires Institutional Review Board approval and training and approval from the Boston Public Schools Research and Evaluation Department.

VII. Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. You will are required to provide consent with your child's consent to be interviewed. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits that you are entitled. Your child can not participate without parent and/or guardian consent. You may choose for your child to not participate in the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits that you are entitled. At any point you and your child have the right to say no. You and your child can change your mind about participating at any time and withdraw. Your child may choose not to answer specific questions. Your child may choose to stop participating at any time. Whether your child participates or not will have no effect on their grade in school or evaluation. There are no consequences for withdrawing or not completing interview sessions.

VIII. Compensation for Participation in Study

For participating in this dissertation study, you and your child be compensated with a $25 travel stipend. Interviews will be recorded over a four month period for six sessions in total. There are no costs to you or your child to participate in this project. Your child will not receive credit or extra credit for participating.

IX. Research Contact for Questions and/or Concerns

If you have concerns or questions about this dissertation study, please contact Dorothy Hines at hinesdor@msu.edu or 919-457-7329. The supervising professor for this project is Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews who may be contacted at 358 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48823 or dcarter@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 408 W. Circle Drive, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact the researcher: Dorothy Hines 107A Broadmeadow Street Apt.1 Marlborough, MA 01752, hinesdor@msu.edu, 919-457-7329.

X. Documentation of Informed Consent and Parent and/or Guardian Permission

Your signature below means you voluntarily agree for your child to participate in this research study.

_____ _____

Parent and/or Guardian Signature Date

Signature of Assenting Child (18 and under)	Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Appendix E: Research Participant Consent Form

Research Participant Consent Form
18 Years and Older

Participant Contact Information

Name:	Current School:	Date:
Interview Number:	Interviewer:	

Researcher and Title:
Dorothy Hines, Graduate Student

Department and Institution
Education Policy, MSU

Address and Contact Information:
620 Farm Lane
358 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48823

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be provided to you for confirmation if requested. To participate in this study we are asking you to be interviewed in six sessions and for access to your academic records. If you are unable to attend in person interviews at an approved Boston Public Schools location, a follow-up interview will be conducted by telephone.

III. Individual Consent:
As a participant in this dissertation study, the researcher will obtain data through interviews and use district level information about students' schooling. Interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed for accuracy. Your participation in this study requires audio-taping and is mandatory. You can not participate in the study if you do not consent to being auto-recorded. If you are unable to attend in person follow-up interviews at an approved Boston Public Schools location, a follow-up interview will be conducted by telephone. Additional information collected may involve participants' previous dropout history, previous school attendance, current school attendance, student grades, and MCAS Scores. Participants consent to these interviews permits access from Boston Public Schools for this data.

IV. Potential Benefits
Participating in this dissertation study will provide participants a space for sharing narratives and experiences re-enrolling in the district. Participation in this study may contribute to how schools are able to serve students that return to high school for a diploma.

V. Potential Risks
To participate in this study, there are no foreseeable physical risks associated. However, there may be questions that are perceived to be sensitive or may cause discomfort about participants' experiences after leaving high school. Given this risk, it is imperative to share with the researcher any known distressful situations that emerge. Interviewees are not required to complete all interviews and you have the right to no longer participate in the study without penalty.

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Information provided as a part of this dissertation will be confidential as expressed within the context of this research project. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extend allowable by law. Data recorded will be transcribed and kept at the Boston Public Schools Re-engagement Center in a locked cabinet to ensure data is not accessible to outside parties. Data will be kept at the Re-engagement Center for a period of five months. After the data collection is complete information kept at the Boston Public Schools Re-engagement Center will be transferred to Michigan State University for analysis and transcription. References to individual comments made by participants will not be disclosed by name or school affiliation. Interview data will not be available to teachers, schools, or principals which directly conceals participant name, address, and parent and/or guardian information. Access to data collected will be available to the researcher, advisor, and IRB at Michigan State University. The information obtained will be utilized for research-based purposes including completion of dissertation requirements, conference presentation, program evaluation, and/or publication. To ensure the

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VIII. Compensation for Participation in Study

For participating in this dissertation study, you will be compensated with a $25 travel stipend. Interviews will be recorded over a four month period for six sessions in total. There are no costs to you to participate in this project.

IX. Research Contact for Questions and/or Concerns

If you have concerns or questions about this dissertation study, please contact Dorothy Hines at hinesdor@msu.edu or 919-457-7329. The supervising professor for this project is Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews who may be contacted at 358 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48823 or dcarter@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 408 W. Circle Drive, 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact the researcher: Dorothy Hines 107A Broadmeadow Street Apt.1 Marlborough, MA 01752, hinesdor@msu.edu, 919-457-7329.

X. Documentation of Informed Consent

Your signature below means you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

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