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Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline:
Factors Influencing Latino Academic Attainment

A dissertation is a partial fulfillment of the requirements
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By

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Dedication

The last three years would not have been possible without the tremendous amount of support from my family, friends, cohort and dissertation committee. I have been fortunate to be surrounded by individuals who have encouraged me, motivated me and believed in me through out this process. To my parents who for as long as I can remember have sacrificed to ensure that I could accomplish all my dreams. Thank you to my sisters, Alma and Iliana, and brother-in-law, Tony, who have set a great example and done all they could to guarantee I kept going. For my wonderful nephews, Anthony, Adrian and Alejandro, they provided countless moments of laughter when I needed it the most. To all my amazing friends who have ensured I maintained balance while pursuing this journey. To my wonderful cohort who began as strangers, developed into friends and became the family that inspired me when no one else understood. To my dissertation chair, Dr. De La Torre, he provided me guidance and wisdom over the last three years. Thanks to my committee members, Dr. Covarrubias and Dr. Restori, who shared their knowledge and time to support me in completing my dissertation.

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Abstract

Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Factors Influencing Latino Academic Attainment

By

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

The purpose of this case study was to draw from the personal experiences of young adult Latino males with a criminal record to obtain a better understanding of how to support them in making gains toward their high school diploma. The conceptual framework that guided this study draws from the existing work of Crenshaw's (1989) notion of intersectionality, a term that identifies the manner in which social constructs impact individual lives. Research has shown that 1 in 6 Latino males will enter the prison system at least once in their lifetime (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). In addition, approximately 50% of young men of color return to a life of crime when they are unable to find an alternative such as continued education (Abrams, Terry, & Frankie, 2011). Therefore, it is vital that educators and other stakeholders learn strategies to disrupt the

school-to-prison pipeline in an effort to best support Latino males in completing their high school diploma. Hyatt (2010) explains that Latino males continue to struggle in education while simultaneously there is a rise in criminal activity from this same group. Students' past and present educational experiences along with criminal history was analyzed through two sets of interviews and a transcript analysis to better understand their perspective on how to best support this particular student population. Also, the participants in the study provided a deeper understanding of why young Latino males are involved in criminal behavior and related challenges in earning a high school diploma. The participants in this study identified social class as a major contributing factor in impacting criminal activity that limited their education gains. Other factors such as age, race and gender influenced peer association of the participants in the study. The participants identified teachers and counselors as playing a significant role impacting their educational attainment. Students in this study identified supportive services that had an impact in making gains toward their high school diploma as well as services that are currently lacking. Also, participants identified both present and past environmental factors that impacted making gains toward earning a high school diploma.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States of America has approximately 5% of the world's population, yet houses about 25% of the world's incarcerated population and possesses the largest prison population in the developed world (Wilson, 2014; Hyatt, 2011). Of notable concern is persistent data pointing to the disproportionate percentage of young males of color who are in prisons and dropout of school (Wilson, 2014). In general, incarcerated individuals lack a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012), ultimately contributing to multiple prison terms (Hyatt, 2011). American high schools have long struggled with the drop out crisis (Cataldi, Laird, & Kewal, Ramani, 2009). Although most states require young people to attend school until the age of sixteen, enforcing laws differ from state to state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). From 2005 to 2007 there was only a small decrease in the high school dropout rate among students age 16 to 24 years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2010 approximately 12.9% of the population over the age of 25 did not have a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), which does not take into account young people under age 25. In 2007, approximately 3.3 million 16- to 24-year-olds were not attending high school or had failed to earn a high school diploma or certificate (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009). Data from 1972 through 2007 indicate that African Americans and Hispanics have consistently dropped out of school at higher rates than Whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009), with Hispanic males at highest risk (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; Brewster & Bowen, 2004) and disproportionately represented among inmate populations (Piquero, 2008). Although data from 1990 through 2013 demonstrates a significant decrease in the overall dropout rate, Hispanic males continue to dropout in

greater numbers than other groups (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2013), approximately 12% of Hispanics dropped out of high school compared to 5% of Whites and 7% of Blacks. Individuals in prison and not living in households were excluded from the data, which suggests underreporting given the large number of homeless youth and individuals in prison without a high school diploma.

A variety of factors contribute to students dropping out of high school, including social background, family dynamics, and academic history (Lee & Burkman, 2003). The connection between truncated education and repeated criminal activity is evident in the percentage of individuals incarcerated without a high school diploma. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, approximately 41% of individuals in state and federal prisons had not completed a high school diploma or GED in 1997 (Harlow, 2003). The U.S. Department of Justice reports that approximately 68% of individuals in state prisons lack high school diplomas (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). It is important to note that during the period of 1990 to 2000 there was a large increase in the prison population due to a variety of factors, including mandatory sentencing and lengthened sentences for repeat offenders (Klein, Tolbert, Bugarin, Cataldi, & Tauschek, 2004).

Joy (2013) summarizes the various contributors to the school-to-prison pipeline as policies and procedures that punish young people rather than educating them. For any given individual, the school-to-prison pipeline is not the result of a single incident, but rather a cycle of interactions with people, experiences (poverty, parent-child problems, etc.) and systems (Osher, Coggshall, Colombi, Woodruff, Francois, & Osher, 2012; Cole & Cohen, 2013). Young males are likely to resort to a life of crime when they are unable

to find another means to survive, which has been a distinct pattern among young Latino men. Many educators recognize that supportive education offers an invaluable opportunity for students with a criminal record to break their cycle of criminal activity. The pattern of young Latino males' tendency to experience multiple encounters with the criminal justice system reflects their limited opportunities that lead them toward involvement in criminal life, which disrupts educational pursuits. In order for Latino males with a criminal record to be successful in making gains toward their high school diploma, educators must understand what critical factors hinder, or in contrast, facilitate and impact their success – knowledge that has the potential to prevent recidivism and stop generational incarceration. The current study will provide insight into the issue by examining previously incarcerated Latino males' perceptions of the factors that impact the pursuit of their high school diploma and, alternatively, those that best support them in their educational attainment.

Problem Statement

Education offers an array of opportunities for individuals regardless of their circumstances or specific obstacles, including poverty, racism, and other societal barriers. Students with criminal records often face challenges similar to typical or middle class students living in the United States, but have additional issues associated with a problematic adolescence, poverty, and the stigma of a criminal history. Every year approximately 50% of young men of color return to a life of crime when they are unable to find an alternative such as continued education (Abrams, Terry, & Frankie, 2011). Although existing research discusses factors that contribute to an individual entering the school-to-prison pipeline, there is minimal focus on how to disrupt the cycle (Cole &

Cohen, 2013). It is vital to identify strategies that deter the occurrence of reoffending, and, accordingly, disrupt the school-to prison pipeline, while recognizing barriers and support systems that assist young offenders in successfully making gains toward a high school diploma.

Latino males are at high risk of entering the criminal justice system, and it is estimated that 1 in 6 Latino males will enter the prison system at least once in their lifetime (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Further, Latinos are entering the state and federal prisons at increasing rates (Hatt, 2011). Studies indicate that 50% of juveniles will reoffend as juveniles while 75% to 90% of individuals with a juvenile record are likely to commit a crime, and, hence, reoffend once they reach adulthood (Abrams, Terry, & Frankie, 2011). Abrams, Terry, and Frankie (2011) explain that males of color have a higher probability of having multiple encounters with the criminal justice system. The pathway toward criminal activity often begins years before a Latino male commits his first crime, and the various policies and practices that determine the school-to-prison pipeline have a greater impact on students of color (Wilson, 2014). Once an individual enters the pipeline pathway, little is done to shift the course. In addition to the policies that impact Latinos in the school-to-prison pipeline, factors such as single parent homes, low-income status, and language barriers increase the likelihood of staying in the pipeline (Rodriguez, 2008). Something needs to be done to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline cycle for Latino males, and targeted educational opportunities are key. Esperian (2010) recognizes that it is more cost effective to educate inmates than to continue to incarcerate them. Education provides a resource to support individuals in developing a sustainable

life free from criminal activity. For many it is a chance at an education they did not experience in their teens.

Significance

Young men of color are often more likely than their White counterparts to have a criminal history that spans from adolescence into adulthood. "Incarcerated youth, who are disproportionately young men of color, are highly likely to experience repeat contact with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems" (Abrams, Terry & Frankie, 2011, p.493). Due to repeat incarcerations, these individuals spend less time in traditional educational settings, which increases their chances of recidivism. The Bureau of Justice Statistics defines recidivism "as acts that result in rearrests, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three year period following prisoners' release" (Joy, 2013, p.179). Further, findings suggest that the return to criminal behavior may involve the same offense and/or a new type of criminal behavior. Esperian (2010) argues that one of the best ways to reduce crime and recidivism is by providing additional educational opportunities.

The primary challenge is that many programs focus on prevention or education within the criminal justice system rather than on resources and strategies that support an individual after release. The literature suggests that many programs exist to deter crime or prevent recidivism for adolescents under the age of eighteen (Greenwood, 2008), but not necessarily for adults. Investigations of adolescent incarceration have identified a connection between educational programming in prison and a decrease in recidivism (Esperian, 2010). Although in some states educational programs for young adults released from incarceration exist, the data on their long-term effectiveness and the types

of programs or educational components most conducive to learning is missing. Consequently, there is little published information on how to support people over the age of eighteen once they have been released and are attempting to continue their education. In order to support individuals with a criminal record, specific environmental, behavioral, and cultural factors contributing to the success of educational endeavors need to be identified. This study will contribute to scholarly literature by identifying factors that contribute to the educational success of previously incarcerated Latino males. The variables examined fall into the categories of teaching strategies, supportive services, and community resources. The findings from this study will not only benefit the scholarly arena by conducting pioneering work in the identification of effective components of education for young Latino males with criminal histories, it also has applied significance because it will inform stakeholders about policies and practices that support the Latino male student population. Specifically, identifying both barriers and supportive strategies can aid educators and other stakeholders (e.g., probation officers, social workers, etc.) with tools to better serve these individuals not only in completing a high school education but also in developing life and employment skills and post-secondary attainment.

Purpose

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to draw from the personal experiences of young adult Latino males with a criminal record to obtain a better understanding of how to support them in pursuing the completion of their high school education and possibly beyond. It is crucial to gain their perspective of what contributed to their criminal pathway, as well as, what has motivated them to return to and stay in school. Latinos continue to be the largest growing population throughout the United

States, yet their educational success has been limited (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). While Latino males continue to struggle in education, there continues to be a rise in their criminal activity and their rates of incarceration in state and federal prison systems (Hyatt, 2011). A shift needs to occur for individuals who exit the criminal justice system and enter education programs, which, based on the literature, should reduce recidivism. Zalaquett (2005) discusses a variety of factors that contribute to the lack of success of Latinos in education, which include racism, poverty, family, and inadequate educational experiences. In order to identify solutions to potential educational barriers, one must understand the early and current experiences of individuals with a criminal record, and identify the perceived challenges and most effective components to post-prison education.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study focus on examining the educational experience of Latino males with a criminal record. The overarching research question is: What are the demographic and programmatic factors that contribute to previously incarcerated Latino males' educational attainment? The specific sub-questions that guide this study are:

1. What demographic factors, such as race, class, gender, and age, interfere with, or alternatively, contribute to the attainment of a high school diploma by Latino males with criminal records?
2. What ways do educators influence the education of Latino male students with a criminal record?

3. What types of programs and program components, such as mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and other supportive services, result in gains toward a high school diploma for Latino male students with a criminal record?
4. What environmental factors, such as employment, community, family, and peer association, influence Latino male students with a criminal record in making gains toward their high school diploma?

Terminology

The study employs the following terms to describe the sample population and the educational experiences of Latino males with a criminal record.

1. **Hispanics or Latinos:** This study used the terms Hispanic and Latino interchangeably, consistent with the 2010 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), but primarily used the latter term. The study takes place in a location in which a large percentage of Hispanics identify as Latino and are from or have ancestry associated with Latin American countries.
2. **Intersectionality:** This term refers to the manner in which social constructs (race, gender, age, etc.) impact individual lives (Crenshaw, 1989).
3. **Recidivism:** The Bureau of Justice Statistics defines recidivism “as acts that result in rearrests, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three year period following a prisoner’s release” (Joy, 2013, p.179).
4. **Risk factor:** Any circumstances (individual or environmental) that increase youths’ likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors (Caldwell & Altschuler, 2001).

5. **School-to-Prison Pipeline:** Joy (2013) describes the school-to-prison pipeline as a variety of factors including policies and procedures that focus on punishing young people rather than educating them and result in students being pushed toward the criminal justice system and away from the school system.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study draws from the existing work of Crenshaw's (1989) notion of intersectionality, a term that identifies the manner in which social constructs impact individual lives (Crenshaw, 1989). Social constructs are categories that have been developed by society to identify a particular group of people based on perceived shared experiences. Crenshaw (1989) used the term to explain how race, gender, sexual identity, and other social constructs are often interconnected and impact the lives of individuals in different ways. Intersectionality is crucial in accounting for variation in the experiences of individuals with a criminal record in an educational setting. Each individual experience has the ability to contribute to our larger understanding of the phenomenon of young Latino males' involvement in crime and related challenges in earning a high school diploma. In my study, as outlined in Figure 1.1, students first had the opportunity to discuss the factors they believed contributed to and impacted their criminal activity. The study examined the various social constructs (gender, race, age, and class) that impact the educational experience of offenders prior to one or more interactions with the criminal justice system through an analysis of students' perceptions of those factors they believe contributed to their criminal activity and recidivism.

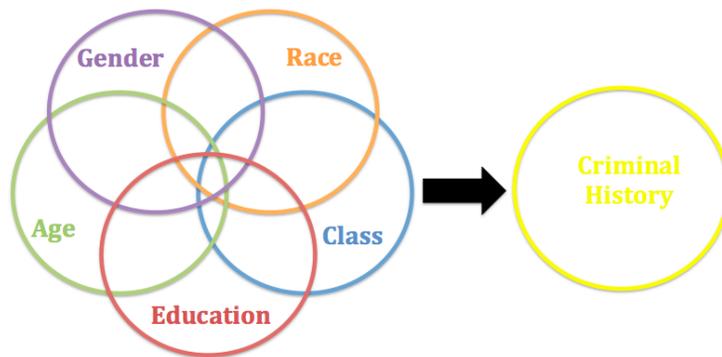


Figure 1.1: Modified framework based on Crenshaw (1989) for initial interview.

The study then focused on the social constructs that influence a Latino male making gains toward a high school diploma after interacting with the criminal justice system as outlined in Figure 1.2. Individuals had the opportunity to share their experiences and discuss their beliefs, representing information with the potential to support educators and human service agencies in better understanding factors that contribute to the successes and challenges of individuals with a criminal record as they pursue their high school diploma. Intersectionality is crucial in providing a foundation to account for the variation in experiences of an individual with a criminal record in an educational setting.

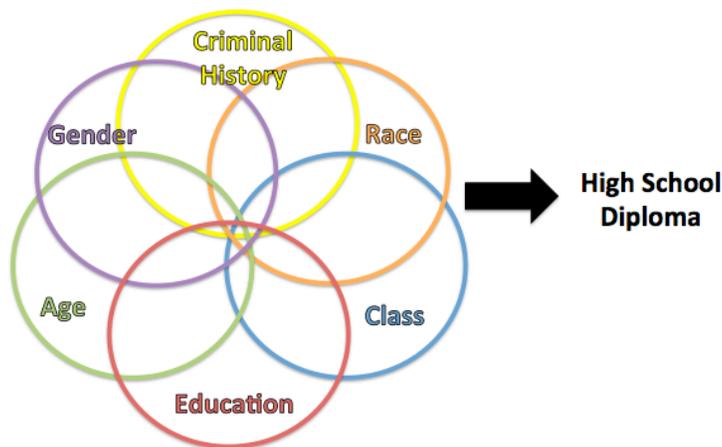


Figure 1.2: Modified framework for the current study based on Crenshaw (1989).

Methodology

The current study was conducted with Latino male students with criminal records who attend the Resiliency Academy (pseudonym). The site has a history of working with male students with a criminal record and has a significant number of Latino students. To identify research participants at the school, purposeful criteria sampling was used because “the logic and power of purposeful sampling...leads to selection of informative rich cases for study in depth” (Glense, 2012, p.41). Students had to fit specific criteria that include: male, Latino, age 18 to 24, a history of or being currently involved in the criminal justice system, and currently pursuing a high school diploma. I used students’ experiences to drive the data collection process, so data were drawn from student interviews and data analysis of transcripts in an effort to understand educational and criminal history and current academic standing. The various methods were coded and analyzed in an effort to triangulate the data (Hendricks, 2009).

Limitations and Delimitations

A delimitation of this study is that participants volunteered to participate, so less motivated students or those uncomfortable in sharing their thoughts may have opted out. In addition, subjects’ level of interest may have deteriorated throughout the course of the study due to the gap between the first and second interview. The study is limited in that only ten males were interviewed from one site, it focused on only a small percentage of the school-to-prison pipeline population who are age 18 to 24, and it omitted Latinos males under the age of eighteen and over the age of 25 years. Students with current cases pending were also omitted from the study. Although the study will provide insight into

their personal experiences and contribute to knowledge of larger phenomena, it has potential limits regarding its breadth, including the possibility that the findings may be specific to those participating in Resiliency Academy. There are all types and severity of youth criminal activity, and those participating in the study may not be representative of the larger population of Latino males with a criminal history or of those who have contributed all types of crimes.

Much of the data collected in this study is self-reported, which can create limitations, as participants may have felt obligated to respond in a particular, more desirable fashion. For example, they may have adjusted their responses to fit what they felt the researcher wanted to hear, the nature of the questions, and the climate of the setting. In addition, individuals only participated in a series of two interviews that included a limited set of questions. Lastly, this study only accounts for personal perspectives and does not take into account other perspectives or opinions about the topic, such as those of educators or other professionals working with the study's population.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One explains the purpose of the study and provides a brief overview of topic, major hypotheses, and the conceptual approach. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature on the connection between the drop-out crisis, the criminal justice system, school-to-prison pipeline, intersectionality, and factors that influence the lives and education of Latino males. Chapter Three discusses the study's design and methodology, including data collection tools, participants, and procedures utilized in this study. The findings of the study are

explained in Chapter Four, which will outline major data themes and specific patterns.

Lastly, Chapter Five includes an analysis and discussion of the findings, connecting them to the research questions and previous research and theory, while stating implications for future research and possible program interventions.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The education system and its ability to prepare a young person for attaining their high school diploma has an impact not just on the individual, but society as well. A high school diploma increases opportunities for all individuals, including the potential for social mobility (Lee & Burkman, 2003; Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, & Orpinas, 2012). Those who complete high school raise their likelihood of pursuing higher education and experiencing greater levels of job security compared to high school dropouts. Each year a large number of young Latino males dropout of high school (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009), and those who dropout have fewer opportunities, including access to quality education in the future. These limitations cause some individuals to turn to a life of crime. It is estimated that “1 in 6 of Latino males will go to prison during their lifetime, versus a prediction of 1 in 17 for White males” (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009, p.78), an inference that Latino males are over two times more likely to land in the criminal justice system than are White males. Sixty-eight percent of state prison inmates do not have their high school diploma (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012), and many of the individuals who lack a high school diploma in prison are Latino males. Although research has demonstrated that increasing the educational attainment of individuals with a criminal history often decreases the likelihood of recidivism, many young criminals never complete their high school diploma (Esperian, 2010).

The current ethnographic case study focuses on the perceptions of young Latino males with a criminal record who are attempting to obtain their high school diploma. Specifically, the study examined factors that influence their success in making gains toward completing high school. Previous research on the drop-out crisis and the

population in the criminal justice system suggests that Latino males are at a higher risk than other populations in experiencing educational challenges and in reengaging with the criminal justice system once they have offended for the first time (Abrams, Terry, & Frankie, 2011). Several reports show that Latinos are the largest growing population in the United States, yet they struggle in all areas of educational attainment (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Research shows that this disadvantage is more notable for males in comparison to females, as Latina females have a documented history of outperforming Latino males in educational attainment in recent years (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014; Colon & Sánchez, 2010; Henry et al., 2008; Sánchez et al., 2005).

Latino males are challenged not just with making gains in education, but overcoming other obstacles such as having criminal records. Many young Latino males struggle to continue their education or contribute to the family household by working or other means especially because they have family and societal pressures to fit in with their peers and male-specific roles (Saenz, 2009). Abrahams, Terry, and Frankie (2011) suggest that past offenders face an array of challenges when attempting to reengage in traditional societal roles, most crucially obtaining their high school diploma. When they exit the criminal justice system, they struggle with forging friendships with healthy peers and avoiding past friends and individuals who engage in criminal behaviors. Saenz (2009) discusses the struggle of a typical Latino male that may experience challenges with various traditional roles when pursuing education. Young Latino males who are recently released may battle identifying with new, more constructive roles in society, such as student, employee, or parent, which can impact interest in or following through

with diploma attainment (Saenz, 2009; Abrahams, Terry, & Frankie, 2011). Although we have identified these challenges, there is an evident gap in scholarly literature relating to understanding their causes, and to the identification of the kinds of educational programs and support systems that would be most beneficial for this population.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Joy (2013) describes the school-to-prison pipeline as a variety of factors including policies and procedures that punish young people rather than educate them. As a result of this system, young people are pushed toward entering the criminal justice system rather than completing high school. The literature suggests that the school-to-prison pipeline is the result of a variety of factors including: interactions with key people, family experiences (poverty, parent-child relationships, etc.) and systems (Osher, Coggshall, Colombi, Woodruff, Francois, & Osher, 2012; Cole & Cohen, 2013). In recent years the education system has adopted a more punitive approach to discipline, which serves as a way to push individuals out of school and into the justice system (Cole & Cohen, 2013). “Since the 1980’s federal funding has made a shift in funding K-12 education less and corrections more, with the end result being that four billion dollars more was spent on corrections than education by 1995” (Hyatt, 2011, p.487). Research demonstrates that the common practice of zero tolerance focuses on eliminating individuals from an education setting (Joy, 2013). This and related practices target students of color at a higher rate, making minority students more likely to enter and remain in the school-to-prison pipeline (Wilson, 2014). Rather than supporting students with discipline challenges, the focus has shifted to eliminating these individuals from education settings, with little to no alternatives in place.

According to Brownstein (2010), the intention of zero tolerance was to create safer schools by eliminating students who engaged in violent or unsafe behaviors. However, it has extended beyond its original purpose, instead pushing individuals out of the education system for more minor behaviors such as truancy and possession of prescription medication. Students of color are more highly impacted by zero tolerance practices, including office referrals and suspensions, at significantly higher rates of two to three times more than are Whites (Hyatt, 2011). Hyatt (2011) further explains that despite an overall decrease in U.S. crime rates, more individuals have faced juvenile incarceration since the inception of zero tolerance policies in schools. Once students exit the traditional education setting and enter the juvenile justice system, they often face institutional rejection upon release (Cole & Cohen, 2013). The result is that when previously incarcerated students wish to finish their education, they experience challenges reentering schools. There is logic to the pattern, as when a student experiences challenges prior to incarceration and no interventions have taken place to address the root problems and their causes, the transition back to school will likely be difficult. Cole and Cohen (2013) explain that once students find themselves outside of a traditional school system, considerable barriers to school completion appear. Some barriers include being behind in credits, age and a lack of support to complete their diploma.

Wilson (2014) identifies five variables that can change the school-to-prison pipeline: (a) eliminate zero tolerance, (b) increase personal efficacy, (c) generate systematic change, (d) community support, and (e) youth engagement (p.52). Cole and Cohen (2013) found four themes that impact a student reentering the school system:

school leadership concerns, regressive labeling and stigmatizing, and access to information (p. 24). An individual labeled as a juvenile offender faces immediate stigma and is treated differently from other students in the education setting. Administrators and other school officials avoid working with these students, instead utilizing probation officers to deal with any challenges, making school success even more distant (Cole & Cohen, 2013). In addition, students with a record are often more closely monitored in traditional educational settings and can be cited for minor infractions and sent back for probation violations. To further demonstrate the barriers faced by students with a criminal history, studies show that students who experience a positive academic outcome within the juvenile system often fail to do the same once released (Cole & Cohen, 2013). Cole and Cohen (2013) site a variety of reasons for this including support from school leadership and challenges with transitioning from a school within a juvenile facility and enrolling in a school with all appropriate records. In both instances a plan is often not in place to support the young person in achieving success.

The Dropout Crisis

No high school is exempt from the reality of young people finding reasons to dropout. Every year throughout the United States, teenagers are pushed out or drop out of high school (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009; Brownstein, 2010). In 2007 Cataldi et al. (2009) found that of students age sixteen to twenty-four approximately 8.6% had dropped out of high school in the United States. Ehrenreich et al. (2012) listed a variety of reasons for dropping out of high school reported across the literature that include factors “identified within a school (e.g., lack of connection to school, boring classes, and loose academic policies), and family (e.g., little parental involvement in

school, absences of parental support)...” (p.199). The decision to dropout of high school has implications beyond a diploma. Lee and Burkman (2003) report “The negative social impact of this loss to our nation's stock of human capital is almost universally acknowledged” (p. 353). Students who dropout of high school do not just negatively impact their own lives; they directly impact their families, communities, and society (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007).

The dropout crisis exists in all school districts throughout the United States - including those in California – and each has long been concerned with addressing the issue. Even though the national dropout rate has declined over the last century (Brewster & Bowen, 2004), there are still many students who are absent several days each year, which can lead to dropping out. Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) found that the data reported for the dropout rate might actually be much higher, especially for males of color, since the method of data reporting is not consistent across the United States. Latino and African American students continue to struggle with completing high school at rates much higher than the overall national dropout rate (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Brewster & Bowen, 2004), and approximately 50% of Latinos do not graduate from high school (Rodriquez, 2008). Latinos are approximately four times more likely than White students to dropout of high school (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). Within the U.S. education system, data repeatedly demonstrates gaps in academic achievement between minorities and White students (Osher et al., 2011).

The disparity for these groups is due to a variety of different reasons, including school-specific characteristics such as environment and staff (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007). Joy (2013) argues that many minority students attend schools with fewer

resources and cites property taxes as one of the major reasons. He further explains that students are forced to learn and adapt to the educational setting provided by educators. Christle et al. (2007) analyzed twenty schools in Kentucky with the highest dropout rate and twenty schools with the lowest dropout rate to determine what factors are associated with the dropout rate. According to Christle et al. (2007), participants identified specific characteristics, including lack of support from staff that contributed to dropping out. Lee and Burkman (2003) discuss numerous studies that demonstrate several contributors to high dropout rates, including social background, family dynamics, and academic history. Further discussed is the fact that many of these contributors are beyond the control of the young person. Lee and Burkman (2003) emphasize the responsibility of the school to address the needs of the young people through structure, both social and academic organization.

There are innumerable reasons to maintain the engagement of students at risk from dropping out, but most schools lack the understanding of what is needed to keep them in school and do not have needed resources. Christle et al. (2007) discussed the idea that the particular school an individual attends can have impact whether or not he or she drops out. In other words, he suggest that if a student who dropped out of school had attended a different school, he or she may have experienced increased chances of graduating. In addition, Brownstein suggests (2010) policies push individual within the school-to-prison pipeline out of the education system rather than find methods to engage them. Current attempts to address the dropout crisis often involve focusing on only some students, particularly those with less severe challenges. In other words, schools tend to provide less support to more challenging individuals or students. Unfortunately, it can be

difficult to keep all individuals engaged, and by examining the dropout rates for students of color, it is clear that Latino and African American males tend to fall into the category of students with more challenges. Saenz (2009) explains that schools with a large number of minority students often face increased challenges, such as lack of resources and high poverty. These barriers make educational success more difficult for minority students.

Osher et al. (2012) discusses the notion that high school dropout gradually develops over time due to a variety of factors. They identify four factors that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline: racial disparities, poor conditions for learning, family-school disconnection, and the failure to build social and emotional capacity in youth (Osher et al., 2011, p.285). Rodriguez (2008) explains that Latino students have additional correlating risk factors such as living in single parent and low-income homes and having language challenges that contribute to the possibility of dropping out. In addition, students of color often have fewer numbers of teachers who look like them, who identify with them, and with whom they can identify. In a study conducted by Halx and Ortiz (2011) participants who were Latino males who had dropped out or were contemplating dropping out were given the opportunity to express their thoughts on the phenomenon of Latinos dropping out of high school. Participants identified a lack of meaningful relationships in their educational setting as a contributing factor to their lack of interest in school. They further explained that meaningful relationships that demonstrated care and respect as lacking in their educational experience. Osher et al. (2011) explains additional contributing factors such as cultural identity, along with mental health factors and trauma, impact student classroom performance. Often,

educators fail to understand how to support students who are different from them or who are faced with these serious life challenges, which puts them at higher risk of dropping out and entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

The drop out crisis is a significant problem that exists at the federal, state and local level. The literature suggests the reason that students drop out falls within two categories factors within the school and home. In addition, students at times are pushed out of an educational setting due to a variety of policies that leave little or no options for them to continue their education (Brownstein, 2010). Although the reasons for dropping out have been identified solutions to support those dropping out are still unclear. It is evident that those who lack a high school diploma will struggle to achieve success in high school (Lee & Burkman , 2003). Latino and African American students are at higher risk of dropping out (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; Saenz, 2009).

Criminal History

Each year about 100,000 transitional-aged youth in the United States exit the juvenile justice system (Snyder, 2004). Individuals who exit the criminal justice system face challenges with employment, public assistance, and housing (Report by the Legal Action Center, 2004). Many immediately return to the location where they committed their crimes, and a significant proportion encounter challenges similar to those experienced prior to arrest, such as reconnecting with criminal associates, financial difficulty, returning to a gang, and challenging family dynamics, making it difficult to move forward. These combined factors, along with the barriers faced in attempting to finish their education, can be overwhelming for young adults. To further emphasize the challenges of this population, most students with a criminal record have a lengthy history

of low achievement and school failure (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009) that often extends from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood. Hence, typically criminal activity does not emerge in adulthood; rather, individuals tend to begin criminal activity during adolescence or earlier and develop their criminal career as an adult (Greenwood, 2008). A key implication of this is that a different, targeted, and nuanced educational approach is called for – one that cannot be provided by traditional high schools.

Prevention

Successful efforts have been made to prevent younger individuals from committing crime, especially with those who are under the age of eighteen. Greenwood (2008) provides the critical insight that prevention strategies can help not only to reduce crime but also to save lives. This dual impact serves as a motivator to have prevention programs in place. Greenwood (2008) explains that delinquency-focused prevention programs have the ability to save taxpayers money if they are successful. Rather than pay for prisons in the future, taxpayers should fund programs that prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system. In addition to prevention programs that mitigate youth crime, there are also programs that focus on preventing first-time offenders from reoffending (Greenwood, 2008). Greenwood (2008) discusses ten programs that he sites as evidence based. The challenge with implementing these programs is many individuals are not properly trained and do not maintain fidelity to the model. Another significant obstacle is that although there are proven effective programs for prevention there is a lack of interest for young people to participate (Greenwood, 2008). Prevention cannot occur if those who need it the most refuse to participate.

Although prevention programs are available in schools and within the community, many youth do not take advantage of them (Greenwood, 2008). Greenwood (2008) further explains some prevention programs are not successful for a variety of reasons, most notably because they fail to utilize evidenced-based program models and employ untrained staff. It is difficult to evaluate which programs are successful because they may vary in their approaches and the collection and reporting of outcome data. Greenwood (2008) discusses more typical prevention approaches, such as home visits, school-based programs that address drugs and alcohol, and community programs that focus on building life skills, but the effectiveness of each is unclear. It is vital to identify effective strategies for this population, particularly for first time offenders, who tend to be younger and to reoffend. Aside for the crucial need to identify best practices for this population, it is essential to develop nuanced outreach strategies. For example, Greenwood (2008) reports that only approximately 5% of individuals who qualify for prevention programs actually participate, which suggests that both innovative outreach strategies and meaningful, updated programs are lacking. Hence, in light of the paucity of successful programs for first-time and early offenders, it is time to consider new secondary prevention approaches and to determine, through empirical study, what kinds of programs and outreach are most effective.

Education

Sander et al. (2011) discusses the connection between low educational performance and involvement in criminal activity. Approximately 80% of those in both the juvenile and adult criminal system report experiencing challenges in education including failing or dropping out (Sander et al., 2011). Beebe and Mueller (2003) explain

that challenges with learning can often be linked to juvenile delinquency. In other words, students who are unsuccessful in education tend to develop a history of juvenile delinquency. Beebe and Mueller (2003) further explain that most juvenile delinquents perform below grade level. Individuals begin to experience injustices within the education system as young as elementary school (Sander et al., 2011). In a study on urban middle school students Baskin, Quintana, and Slaten (2014) discuss that low academic performance in school often predicts later negative outcomes such as unemployment and crime. The authors further discuss that many individuals begin to experience academic challenges during the time in which they also face relationship shifts at home and in school (Baskin, Quintana, & Slaten 2014). Findings from the Baskin et al. (2014) indicate that stress in school and at home impacts academic attainment and can increase the selection of negative peer relationships such as gangs.

Case, Fasenfest, Sarri, and Phillips (2005) discuss the prison system's more recent recognition of the importance of education, as many have established vocational and college courses inside prisons. The goal of prison educational efforts is to promote the development of skills so that incarcerated individuals are less likely to reoffend post-release. Unfortunately, many of these programs are not evaluated for effectiveness and may not be impactful for large numbers of individuals in prison, and a significant portion of the prison population does not receive educational opportunities. Further, many incarcerated individuals do not receive employment or job training while incarcerated, which are known to prevent later recidivism (Case, Fasenfest, Sarri, & Phillips, 2005).

The Impact of a Record

Having a criminal history impacts an individual long after release.

“Imprisonment diminishes the earnings of adult men, compromises their health, reduces familial resources, and contributes to family breakup” (Wildeman & Western, 2010, p. 157). Males with a criminal record often face challenges in perusing jobs with higher wages because their record can place limitations on certain careers. Wildeman et al. (2010) discuss the generational impact involvement in the criminal justice system can have on families stating that in many poor communities being incarcerated is a common occurrence. Hyatt (2011) discusses the impact of incarceration post-release, which can prevent an individual from being able to vote or receive public assistance. When a previously incarcerated individual is able to establish reliable employment and develop healthy family relationships, crime is less likely (Wildeman & Western, 2010). In contrast, formerly incarcerated individuals with challenging family relationships and limited opportunity have an increased likelihood of re-incarceration. A criminal record impacts family relationships and friendship of the offender as well as their potential for employment. Wildeman and Western (2010) discuss the wide range of consequences that can impact a person and their family that extend beyond the prison walls. It is for this reason they suggest that reform must take into account other resources that need to be supported such as mental health, counseling, job training, and public assistance (Wildeman & Western, 2010).

Recidivism

Education is often viewed by society as a stepping-stone for upward mobility (Lee & Burkman, 2003; Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, & Orpinas, 2012). The U.S. Department of Justice recognizes education as the most effective tool for reducing recidivism among

those previously incarcerated (Esperian, 2010, p. 324). In other words, the best way to deter someone from committing another crime is through education. Education can provide the tools to move beyond criminal activity and to become a contributing member of society. Given that the highest rate of recidivism occurs within the first year of release (Jung et al. 2010), it is crucial to reengage individuals quickly after release and to have a plan in place to support them. Based on the literature, that plan must have a strong educational component that is relevant to the individual's needs.

Abrams et al. (2011) discusses the vast number of programs developed to decrease recidivism and explains that many have been unsuccessful do to the short period of time the young person is involved in the program citing 2.3 months as the average time engaged. Age of first interaction with the criminal justice system is the strongest predictor that an individual would recidivate (Abrams et al., 2011). Case et al. (2005) describes the link between effective education and decreased recidivism and the vast amount of literature that supports this. According to Nuttall, MacDonald, and Brandon (1995), young offenders pose a challenge to correctional agencies because they face unique barriers such as low education, history of substance abuse, lack of sex education to name a few that need to be addressed. To further investigate this challenge, Nuttall et al. evaluated a program that supported young inmates convicted of violent crimes intended to increase educational opportunities and thereby decrease recidivism. Although it is evident that education has the potential to decrease reoffending, it is important to determine precisely how to most effectively support students through this process, especially since not all individuals who attempt to complete their high school education successfully earn a high school diploma.

In short, although available research demonstrates the advantages of education, it fails to provide data on how to encourage previously incarcerated individuals to attend school and on the kinds of programs that best support them in completing high school. Similarly, despite research suggesting that education has the potential to decrease recidivism (Case et al., 2005), limited educational programs exist and evidence of their effectiveness in maintaining student interest and achieving positive outcomes is weak.

High School Diploma

Education can provide more opportunity, especially for employment, and, in turn, employment opportunities can be crucial in helping individuals support their families. Furthermore, education may impact offenders with children, as Wildeman and Western (2011) discuss existing literature they explain, “Improved literacy and more schooling would likely benefit fragile families by enhancing formerly incarcerated fathers’ economic opportunities and, perhaps, the quality of their parenting” (p. 171). Hence, experts believe that providing an education for males with a criminal record has advantages that extend well beyond individual success; it provides the potential to help support children and families and to contribute to the larger community. Peters (2011) argues that incarceration impacts not just the individual, but communities as well. For example, he argues that research demonstrates that young offenders tend to experience mental illness, poverty, and substance abuse, all problems that impact their families and the communities in which they live.

With regard to quality of life, Ehrenreich et al. (2012) discuss the opportunities for socioeconomic advancement resulting from earning a high school diploma. There is a sizeable difference in the earnings of people who graduate from high school compared to

those who do not, which equals a \$6000 per year difference for the average income of these two demographics in the United States (Census, 2000). Hence, it is in the best interests of educators and community members to assist older youth with criminal records with knocking down barriers to education and the successful attainment of a high school diploma.

Earning a high school diploma and resulting employment opportunities are not the only benefits to secondary education. Education, prepares young people for numerous opportunities such as developing skills to manage the challenges and expectations of adulthood (Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, & Orpinas, 2012). Research demonstrates that individuals who graduate high school continue to experience positive impacts as an adult such as better income and health (Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, & Orpinas, 2012). Based on the research discussed by Ehrenreich et al. (2012) one can infer that those lacking a high school diploma experience challenges such as problem solving as an adult, lower income levels and more health concerns. Individuals with a criminal record often fail to develop in these areas due to the disruption of educational opportunities while they are in the school-to-prison pipeline.

California public schools face ongoing challenges supporting students who return to high school after dropping out for any reason. Only 78.5% of California students who began high school in 2008 graduated with their class in 2012 (Department of Education, 2013). This means that over 20% of students who should have graduated in 2012 did not. For many of these individuals they never finish their secondary education. Alternative schools, such as charters, continue to increase in numbers, but equally rising is the number of disenfranchised students who are unsuccessful in tradition public school

settings (Kim et al., 2007, p. 207). Increasingly, students seek alternative education options in an effort to address their individual needs (Kim et al., 2007). In 2001 the National Center for Educational statistics identified 10,900 alternative schools focused on serving at-risk youth (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Based on literature reviewed about alternative high school settings Kim and Taylor (2008) discuss that alternative settings provided an important foundation of trust in the staff among their participants. However; in the study conducted by Kim and Taylor (2008) the alternative school they examined did not provide students a meaningful education. Using theoretical framework the researchers were able to establish that there was a culture of caring and trust. Their investigation's findings suggest that providing one strong dimension of alternative options to high school, such as a culture of trust, is not adequate. Rather, individuals with nontraditional needs require school settings that allow them to trust, build skills, and learn about subjects that are personally meaningful and valuable to real life.

Despite the overall decline in the national dropout rate, that for Los Angeles County needs attention. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)'s current graduation rate is 69.9% (California Department of Education, 2012), indicating that approximately 30% of students who entered ninth grade did not finish high school with their class. If nearly 1/3 of the state's high schoolers do not complete their high school diploma, each year the state is faced with huge numbers of young people with limited options for gainful employment and quality of life. Therefore, it is in the state's best interest to identify and provide well-tailored educational opportunities for students at risk for faltering on in the educational path. One such student subpopulation is young people who exit the criminal justice system. About 68% of state prison inmates do not have

their high school diploma (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012), yet it is known that students with a criminal record who complete high school have a decreased chance of reentering the criminal justice system, suggesting that the chance to complete a secondary education may lead to new opportunities away from crime (Esperian, 2010).

While much of the research demonstrates that education results in decreased recidivism, young males of color who obtained an education prior to release (while incarcerated) still have challenges with recidivism. Nuttall, Hollmen, and Staley (2003) conducted a study examining violent youth offenders and found that the overall recidivism rate for inmates who obtained their GED during incarceration decreased. However, males under age 21 years who obtained their GED did not have the same success, calling into question the value of a GED in place of a high school diploma. According to Zajacova (2012), individuals who obtain a GED also experienced an increased rate of substance abuse and crime rates when compared to high school graduates. When comparing GED recipients with dropouts and with high school graduates, GED recipients had more in common with high school dropouts than with graduates (Zajacova, 2012). In other words, GED recipients experienced challenges such as unemployment at the same rate as high school dropouts - challenges that are likely to increase recidivism.

Factors that Diminish Successful Educational Gains

Individuals with a criminal record who want to complete high school face an array of obstacles that are not commonly present for the traditional high school student. Not surprisingly, the obstacles are identical to those that contribute to high prison recidivism. Sharkey, Furlong, Jimerson, and O'Brien (2003) discuss the definition of risk

factors for recidivism as “any influence in a youth’s life, whether biological, behavioral, environmental, socio-cultural, or demographic that increases the probability of a negative outcome” (p. 468), and for youth offenders include school performance, peer association, drugs, and family environment. They argue that the combination of risk factors may differ from person to person, but their collective impact often is the failure to complete high school. Sharkey et al. (2003) explain that certain risk factors may have a bigger impact on educational attainment than others such as negative peer influence and certain risk factors may correlate with each other but not with all factors. Similarly, not all risk factors equally impact the likelihood of recidivism, and specific risk factors or combinations of them may impact individuals to differing degrees. Nonetheless, the types of risk factors that play a role in low educational achievement appear to be similar to those that lead to recidivism for individuals with a criminal record.

The Department of Probation in Orange County, California utilizes a local risk assessment to identify adolescents who have a greater risk of offending (Sharkey et al. 2003). The assessment examines nine categories, “including prior criminal record, institutional commitment, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, parental control, school/employment discipline problems, learning problems, runaway/escape behavior and negative peer influence” (Sharkey et al., 2003, p. 475), all serving as parallel risk factors that potentially play a role in whether students with criminal records complete high school. Sharkey et al. (2003) found that all students on probation who did not attend school recidivated. The Orange County Risk Assessment supports the importance of a student with a criminal record attending school. Individuals who do not attend school are at higher risk of reoffending (Sharkey et al., 2003).

Individuals who return to school after being incarcerated or interacting with the criminal justice system bring with them their previous educational experiences, and Sander (2011) explains that those experiences involve considerable failure. A history of educational failure makes returning to school more difficult, and often result in students dropping out when they encounter challenges such as mental health, discipline due to behavior, disabilities, and discrimination (Sander, 2011). This suggests that these students need additional resources to support them in pursuing an education (Sander, 2011); their desire to succeed is not enough. Further, the intent to pursue a high school diploma is not adequate for preventing recidivism. Abrams et al. (2011) discusses factors that put males of color at high risk of reoffending, such as gang affiliation, drug abuse and, notably, weak connections to educational settings. Although research supports the factors that place males of color at higher risk there is an evident gap in literature on how to support these individual after they have been involved in the criminal justice system.

Factors that Increase Successful Educational Gains

Identifying the factors that support individuals with a criminal record and developing educational programs, settings and cultures that take them into account are crucial in supporting the educational success of youth with criminal records. Moody, Kruse, Nagel, and Conlon's (2008) research on a specific career development program for incarcerated youth found, through the use of a series of surveys, that successful program completion was dependent on students' perceived value of the program. When students perceived the program as valuable, their chances of completing high school increased. The study suggests that a high quality program for individuals with criminal records must take into account the personal value to the student, students who value their

program are more likely to successfully complete and not reoffend (Moody, Kruse, Nagel, & Conlon, 2008).

There is a range of setting structures for post-incarcerated youth, and the type and degree of structure may influence the educational success of individuals with a criminal record. Some studies suggest that educational settings utilizing a social justice approach may be beneficial to this population. An educational setting with a social justice approach provides equal access to education for all students, regardless of their challenges (Sanders, 2011). This type of program may be especially important for students with a criminal record who generally have not experienced equal access to education. Nastasi (2008) explains that social justice may involve “a range of child and adolescent needs, including education and mental and physical well being, and as encompassing the multiple ecological contexts, including school, peer group, family, community, and society” (p. 490). Educational programs that take these multiple factors into account consider the whole individual and their unique experiences and needs. This approach is unique to those with a criminal record because for many students they have not previously bought into their previous educational experience. Social justice may provide the buy-in from a student that will increase the likelihood of them completing their education (Moody, Kruse, Nagel and Conlon, 2008).

Social justice programs avoid defining a person by his or her criminal history, but understand how it may impact one's life. Sander et al. (2011) studied two juvenile justice centers to evaluate the impact of social justice practices on education, defining social justice as an environment that embodies fairness and equal access. Their comprehensive study examined the role of social justice by including influential people

and systems in students' lives and not just focusing on the students themselves. Sanders (2011) examined the concept of social justice from a variety of perspectives including individuals on probation, their families, teachers within juvenile facilities and probation officers. Sander et al. argued for the importance of considering the perceptions of an array of individuals in the lives of students with criminal records, as they may have unique insights into the impact of social in an educational setting. Their data revealed that most categories of study participants felt that educational opportunities were limited once an individual committed a crime. In other words, although participants may have perceived social justice as positive it, was limiting after an individual committed a crime.

It is not enough to identify that education is important to the well-being of young males of color with a criminal record. Rather, it is important to consider what factors contribute to their high school completion. Examining all aspects of the home, school, and community can provide relevant data that enhances our understanding of the full range of factors that contribute to these students completing high school. The findings drawn from Sander et al.'s study contributes to our understanding of how equal access to education can support individuals with a criminal record by decreasing recidivism, but other support systems must be considered. In other words, it is not enough to provide a meaningful education without addressing other areas of need at the same time.

By examining and identifying a fuller range of factors that collectively help to increase the retention of students with a criminal background, we may find a way to develop successful programs and document key outcomes. Key outcomes could include a decrease of re-offenses and increased graduation rates. Although Greenwood (2008) explains that several programs and models exist that focus on preventing delinquency,

little is actually being done to support students after they have been identified as delinquents. In other words, factors that serve as educational barriers for students with records, such as gang participation, drugs, lack of social and effective communication tools, weak problem solving skills, and other symptoms are not always identified nor addressed. One consideration in counteracting these barriers is the abovementioned research that suggests when students with criminal records feel connected to an educational program, the chances of recidivism is lower. In addition, community support can decrease the chances of recidivism (Abrams, et al., 2011). Abrams et al. (2011) found that education and employment are the two biggest indicators of recidivism. Community can support by providing more opportunities by such means as job training and access to education. Programs that have mentoring or therapeutic components and are individually tailored to fit students' needs can contribute to reducing the chances of recidivism (Abrams, et al., 2011). Although the literature reveals that education can help to decrease the chances of recidivism, student willingness to engage and commit to an education program is important to avoiding future reoffending. As Abrahams, Terry and Frankie (2011) found that "an increased length of participation in reentry services decreased the likelihood of new convictions in the juvenile system, but not in the adult system" (p. 492). The challenge is determining what combination of factors and educational program and support service elements are most beneficial to Latino males age 18 to 24 with a criminal record, as we cannot assume that what has been found most beneficial to younger students or to the general criminal population will be beneficial to this specific demographic group.

Race, Class and Gender

Although research demonstrates that education is one of the best methods of lowering recidivism, the challenge is creating a successful environment for individuals with a criminal record to flourish (Esperian, 2010). Social constructions such as race, gender, and class have a history of being used to create both privilege and oppression under certain conditions, including in educational settings (Covarrubias, 2011). Young Latino males with a criminal record experienced oppression through the same barriers as typical students and at times considerably more (Nuttall et al., 1995). Although research has identified broad approaches that have been successful in keeping individuals engaged in education, they may be missing the factors or nuanced approaches that young Latino males with a criminal record may feel are most valuable. According to Abrahams et al. (2011) the older an individual gets, the more difficult it is for him or her not to reoffend, so developing effective programs for younger offenders is crucial. In order to best support younger Latino males with a record, it is crucial for support providers to understand their perspective on what assists them in making successful gains toward earning their high school diploma. Even when studying the young Latino male offender's perspective, there may be considerable individual differences, as each individual's experience is different despite similarity in demographics such as race and gender, age and a criminal history. It is important to recognize that complexity exists and the answers are not black and white, emphasizing the need for in-depth and nuanced studies on this population.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) used the term intersectionality to describe the way in which race, gender, sexual identity, and other social constructs are interconnected and impact

individuals' lives within relationships and society. Thus, intersectionality provides a critical lens to examine what critical factors influence the educational success of young Latino men with a criminal record. The current literature review, consistent with the concept of intersectionality, emphasizes that multiple factors work together to create an individual's experience in any situation, which is true for young Latino males with a criminal record. "Intersectionality examines how distinctive social power relations mutually construct each other, not just that social hierarchies exist" (Collins, 1998). Each student with a criminal record is trying to overcome not merely this or her repeated experience with one institution, but rather with an array of social institutions. Covarrubias (2011) explains that Chicano students experience success in education at lower rates because they are pushed out of high school at higher rates as a result impacting the likelihood of post-secondary attainment. These outcomes are tied to not just a single experience, but to a number of interactions within an educational setting, as well as other institutional setting and societal experiences.

Although it has been documented that individuals who fall within a particular demographic may be more likely to experience similar barriers, it is also true that a person's identity is made up of a variety of social constructs such as race and gender (Trahan, 2011). Trahan (2011) argues that a person's individual experiences are impacted by social constructs. As a result, people with different social constructs should have dissimilar experiences in the criminal justice system. Individuals with a criminal record may identify factors influencing their education that are a result of or a consequence of being self-identified or perceived as part of a particular group within a given institutional setting. Each person's experience is unique despite having

commonalities with individuals with similar experiences, each experience has several dimensions. Intersectionality provides an approach to evaluate the various dimensions.

Half of Latino students who enter the public education system drop out of high school (Rodriquez, 2008), and Latino males are more than two times more likely to go to prison during their lifetime than White males (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Although programs have been developed in an effort to address these challenges, not all have been successful. It is known that prevention can help reduce crime (Greenwood, 2008). Research reveals that a high quality program supports decreased recidivism (Moody, Kruse, Nagel, & Conlon, 2008). When considering the above studies it is important to recognize that students with a criminal history often have experienced various challenges in education such as being unable to earn credits (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009). “Dropouts also make up disproportionately higher percentages of the nation’s prison and death row inmates” (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009, p.1). In addition, previous offenders have biological, behavioral, environmental, socio-cultural and demographic factors that increase the probability of a negative criminal related outcome (Sharkey, Furlong, Jimerson & O’Brien, 2003). These factors can impact the success an individual has in not reoffending. A high school diploma increases opportunity such as upward mobility (Lee & Burkman, 2003; Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, & Orpinas, 2012). A high school diploma has the potential to help individuals decrease the probability of a criminal related outcome.

Studies of young men with criminal records reveals that it is important to understand what factors influence them in making positive changes in their lives that result in not reoffending. Many studies documented the fact that it is more cost effective

to educate an individual than to incarcerate them (Esperian, 2010). Yet, Kim and Taylor (2008) found that alternative settings serving at risk youth often are able to establish trust but fail to create an environment with meaningful education. Understanding a Latino male with a criminal record's perspective on trying to obtain their diploma and analyzing it through intersectionality can provide insight on how to best support individuals with a criminal record.

Summary

The Latino population continues to experience increased growth in the United States (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Although the number of Latinos in the U.S. has increased, the gains in education attainment have not (Vasquez-Salgado & Chavira, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Instead Latino males represent a significant number of those incarcerated in both the juvenile and adult criminal justice system. The school-to-prison pipeline has supported a culture where young males of color are impacted by zero tolerance policies where they are impacted at two to three times then White students (Hyatt, 2011). There is an evident gap in the literature that discusses individuals age 18 to 24 who have experienced interaction with the criminal justice system and are now attempting to reengage in education. This study aims to support a culture that creates a system to stop the cycle of recidivism and generational incarceration. By examining the personal perspective of Latino males with a criminal record stakeholders can begin to better understand the social constructs that impact the educational aspirations of these young men thereby having the potential to create policy to better support them.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to develop an understanding of the factors that contribute to the academic progress of male Latinos with a criminal record. Specifically, the study focused on current Latino students age 18 to 24 due to the paucity of research literature on this demographic. Student perspectives were explored to determine the environmental factors that they believed influence student progress toward obtaining their high school diploma.

Chapter Organization

The chapter begins by discussing the study's qualitative approach and the setting and context of the phenomenological case study, which was a leadership development program that partners with a project-based charter school. A description of the participants, who were 10 Latino males with a criminal record, along with an explanation on how they were selected will follow. Next, an explanation of the research design describes the procedures and data collection measures used along with an overview of the types of data analyses. Lastly, the role of the researcher is described and includes a discussion of my experience working with students with criminal backgrounds and of how that experience influenced my researcher role.

Research Questions

The overarching research question is: What are the demographic and programmatic factors that contribute to previously incarcerated Latino males' educational attainment? The specific sub-questions that guide this study are:

1. What demographic factors, such as race, class, gender, and age, interfere with, or alternatively, contribute to the attainment of a high school diploma by Latino males with criminal records?
2. In what ways do educators influence the education of Latino male students with a criminal record?
3. What types of programs and program components, such as mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and other supportive services, result in gains toward a high school diploma for Latino male students with a criminal record?
4. What environmental factors, such as employment, community, family, and peer association, influence Latino male students with a criminal record in making progress toward their high school diploma?

Research Design and Tradition

Research Design

This study is an ethnographic case study. The study will be conducted at a leadership development program located in an urban area in California that partners with a project-based charter school. The site was selected because it has a student population consisting of a high school students ages 18 to 24 in which approximately 50% are Latino. Furthermore, the site recruits and provides support for individuals with a criminal record. The case study design was used because it provides “an intensive description and analysis of a bounded social phenomenon...” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p.31). The study was bounded because it included two interview protocols, as well as a document analysis within one timeframe and a single location. In addition, the study looked in-depth at participants’ experiences and involved a detailed exploration of

individual examples of Latino males 18 to 24 years who had a criminal record and were trying to obtain a high school diploma (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Individuals shared their thoughts on the factors they felt contributed to their criminal activity, as well as previous and current educational experiences. This data was analyzed and coded in an effort to understand a larger phenomenon.

Research Tradition

The research tradition employed in this case study is ethnography, as it was best suited for describing the experiences of a particular group (Glense, 2011). The purpose of ethnography is to study a small group to gain a deep understanding of a larger group. In the study two forms of data collection commonly used by ethnographers were included: semi-structured interviews and data analysis (Creswell, 2012). Through a holistic approach, the ethnographer was able to examine a whole experience rather than a single component (Schram, 2006). Furthermore, an ethnographic approach allowed the researcher to learn directly from the group to allow for a full understanding or portrait of the participants and researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The current study's approach allowed me to serve as a researcher gaining in-depth knowledge directly from young, previously incarcerated Latino males. By gaining data about each interviewee's personal experiences and perceptions of the various factors that have influenced his education, patterns of shared experiences emerged. These patterns were analyzed to determine shared themes amongst the group. The goal of an ethnography "is to describe what the people, place or status ordinarily do, and the meanings that ascribe to what they do, under ordinary or particular circumstances, presenting that description in a manner that draws attention to regularities that implicate cultural process" (Wolcott, 1999, p.68).

Connection to Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the study was to better understand what factors contribute to Latino students, ages 18 to 24 years with a criminal record in obtaining their high school diploma. Through ethnography, I gained knowledge of individual students' experiences and their beliefs of how various factors impacted them as they strived to earn a high school diploma. The approach provided the data and a means to better understand how to best support this population. It is for this reason that my research was conducted through multiple interviews and document analysis. Interviews will allow participants to speak of their personal experience while the document analysis of transcripts will provide a better understanding of a participant's educational experience. This approach will support the researcher in better understanding this phenomenon.

Research Setting

Demographics

The interviews and document analysis took place at Resiliency Academy (pseudonym), a leadership development program that partners with a project-based charter school located in California. It serves students ages 16 to 24 who have been pushed out or aged out of the traditional high school setting. Many individuals attending the program have attended two or more high schools in an effort to earn their high school diploma. The program enrolls students on a monthly basis, which causes its demographics to shift from month to month. As of December 2014, approximately two hundred individuals attended the location. Approximately 50% of students self-identified as Hispanic or Latino during their intake process. A majority of the remaining population identified as Black or African American. Throughout the history of the program, the site

has served primarily Latino and African American students. At the time of the study, the program had slightly more male than female students, and the majority of students were over the age of 18 years. Many students in attendance experienced an array of challenges, and over 90% were considered socio-economically disadvantaged. According to the 2000 Census, the area served by Resiliency Academy has nearly 300,000 residents. Of these residents approximately half are White, and the community has a wide range of income and education levels. Many students attending Resiliency Academy live in the same neighborhoods within the greater community.

Site Selection

I selected the site using criteria sampling. Criterion sampling allows the researcher to examine a particular group to study a larger phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The site selected has a history of working with this population. I needed a setting with a history of working with male students with a criminal record. “The logic and power of purposeful sampling...leads to selection of informative rich cases for study in depth” (Glense, 2012, p.41). The specific criteria I used were: Latino, male, age 18 to 24 years, had a criminal record, and was pursuing a high school diploma. The site I selected has a population that will support this study.

Re-entry Program

Resiliency Academy was selected because it is a second chance opportunity for individuals over the age of 18 years seeking their high school diploma. Hence, its students have been unsuccessful in traditional high school settings. The program serves individuals with a history of or currently involved in the criminal justice system. This includes both the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. Students who exit the

criminal justice system and return to society are referred to as the re-entry population. At the time of the study, the school did not have data detailing the percentage of individuals who had a juvenile or an adult criminal record. However, students are given the opportunity to self-disclose this information during the interview process to enter the program. Those individuals who are open about their criminal record can qualify for re-entry programs at the site, which assists them in overcoming challenges and meet short and long term goals through action plans supported by wrap around case management.

Researcher Roles

I gained access to this site because I worked at the school as the Program Coordinator. As a result, I was familiar with the population within the setting. My experiences working with both the leadership development program and the charter school granted me access and approval from the required gatekeepers. Through my role as Program Coordinator and researcher I was able to establish a rapport with students that yielded rich data. Throughout the course of this study I took on multiple roles including researcher, educator as well as an administrator at the site where I will be conducting my research. It was important to clearly understand these roles because they had the potential to impact the data collection process (Glesne, 2011). As a researcher I must collect and analyze the data through a variety of processes and ensure my other roles do not impact the study.

Biases

My personal experiences have impacted my views of students with a criminal record. As a result I have preconceived ideas about the population I will be examining. Much of this stems from working with students with a criminal record over the past four

years. This role has ranged from teacher, advisor to administrator. Through these experiences I have gained ideas about this population. Each role has brought about different perspectives. First, students with a criminal record face a range of challenges related to their record that impact obtaining their high school diploma. Second, students with a criminal record can overcome barriers within their community through educational support. Third, students with a criminal record have little confidence in their ability to obtain their high school diploma. Lastly, the longer the student's experience within the criminal justice system, the more struggles they encounter trying to obtain their diploma.

Strategies to Mitigate the Effects

As a researcher I must ensure that I develop strategies to mitigate the impact of the effects of the research on the researcher, as well as the impact of the researcher on the research. My experiences can both add and take away from my study. In other words, I must acknowledge the lens I have developed, but not allow it to skew my research. Glesne (2012) explains that researchers bring their own attributes to a study. Although I have no personal experience in the criminal justice system, I am familiar with many aspects of both the adult and criminal justice system that can allow the participant and I to share a common language. Although I am familiar with the criminal justice system, I may be seen as an outsider that may make it challenging to gain information from participants. I must not try and force specific answers, but rather learn from the research (Glesne, 2011).

In order to mitigate the effects of the research on the researcher I will keep an ongoing journal to document the experience of the case study. This approach will allow for reflection, where I can discuss my role in the study and share my notes with others

(Creswell, 2012). I can express my thoughts and feelings as I move through the study. In addition, I plan to ask open-ended questions to participants during the interview process. This will allow individuals to answer as they choose and prevent me from asking leading questions (Seidman, 2006). Through observations I will gain additional data. This will allow for a less intrusive approach. I can observe individuals and gain additional insight about the study. Lastly, I will use informant feedback to ensure the accuracy of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data and Sample Sources

Data Sources

Students served as data sources through interviews. I conducted private interviews with 10 participants who served as the primary source for my data collection. Interviews were used to gain an understanding of participant demographics and criminal and educational history. In addition to participating in two interviews, students agreed to grant access to have their transcripts reviewed and analyzed. The student transcripts served as the final data source, which included data from current and past schools.

Sampling

The purpose of my study was to identify factors that influence students with a criminal record in obtaining their high school diploma. Criterion sampling was used to identify students that fit specific criteria: Latino, male, age 18 to 24 years, were in the process of pursuing their high school diploma, and had a history of a juvenile or adult criminal record. Criterion sampling was beneficial in that participants had shared the experience of similar phenomena such as school problems and criminal activity. Although I examined transcripts, people served as the primary data source for the study.

In order to identify individuals for the study I gave the criteria to a program counselor, who recruited students by sending them a letter and being available for questions.

Students were not given incentives or compensation for participating in the study.

Ethical Issues

Many ethical issues were considered during the course of the study. It was my obligation to protect the identity of the individuals participating in the study; therefore, all settings and individuals were given pseudonyms. Confidentiality was stressed in order for participants to feel they could be honest about their experiences. Any data that may identify the setting of the study were omitted from this manuscript. Lastly, I considered my own personal bias, and stayed focused on allowing each participant's entire story to unfold. I used a reflective journal and check-ins with participants to maintain my objectivity.

Research Invitation and Informed Consent

Prior to the study's launch, I developed invitations along with a copy of the adult informed consent form for potential participants. It detailed the various aspects of the study, including data collection methods, time commitment, potential benefits and risks, and confidentiality. Upon approval from California State University, Northridge Office of Research and Sponsored Projects and Resiliency Academy (pseudonym), an invitation and consent form were hand delivered by counselors to potential participants. The letter explained the purpose of the study, the qualifications, the expectations, and provided contact information. I followed up with potential participants one week after the invitation was distributed by having counselors provide a second copy of the letter. Once individuals expressed interest in the study, they returned the consent form signed by their

parent or guardian. In addition, contact information was provided to participants so that they knew whom to contact if they chose to withdraw from the study.

Data Collection Instruments

This ethnographic case study used semi-structured interviews protocols to gain an understanding of the experience of Latino male students with a criminal record trying to obtain their high school diploma. The protocols can be found in Appendix C and D. Hence, each participant took part in a focus group and in two interviews, each with different questions. The first interview (Appendix C) focused on background, criminal history, as well as the social constructs that impacted the participant during their educational experience prior to and during their involvement in the criminal justice system. Individuals were asked a series of questions to gain clear understanding of how their background may have impacted their criminal history. The second interview (Appendix D) focused on educational experiences associated with previous and current educational settings. Participants were asked a series of questions to gain an understanding of how their educational experience has shaped their lives. Interview questions were developed by the researcher based on the review of the literature related to this topic.

Document Review

Through a review of student transcripts, I gained additional data about each student's educational experience and academic progress. I reviewed student transcripts to assess schools attended, grades, and credits earned, and I entered the data into an excel spreadsheet for further analysis.

Interviews Process

Upon agreement to participate in the study, students were contacted via phone or e-mail to make arrangements for their initial interview. All initial interviews were conducted during June of 2015, and students had the choice of meeting with the researcher before or after school hours. Students were interviewed at their school setting and received a copy of the questions at the start of the interview. Students had the option of being interviewed in an office or available classroom.

Prior to the start of the interview I ensured that the interview setting was free of distractions and made sure the participant felt at ease in the setting by asking if the temperature was ok, if they needed water and if the setting was ok. During the initial interview, I greeted the participant, made sure he was comfortable in the setting, and verified that the informed consent form had been signed. The interview was then conducted in a semi-structured manner, affording more in-depth prompting of responses to the main questions (Glense, 2011). Once the interview was complete, the meeting time for the second interview was determined and the interviewee was thanked and informed that they would receive a transcript of the interview within two weeks if requested. The interview was later transcribed and sent to the participant. Participants had the opportunity to verify and make any changes in the transcript over the following week. Once the transcript was verified, coding of the responses began. The second interview was conducted in the same manner as the initial interview.

Data Analysis

Data Preparation

Through a review of the literature related to students with a criminal record obtaining their high school diploma, potential themes and codes were developed. In

addition to this method, I used an online company to transcribe data collected in the field, which assisted with identifying additional themes. The fundamental themes include the following: types of support systems, student barriers, teacher variables, and high school experience will be identified.

Coding

Upon completion of all data collection, transcribing interviews, data was analyzed and coded. After all codes were identified, the data were reexamined to determine whether all codes were relevant and/or needed to be eliminated or expanded. The data were reviewed multiple times to ensure that all codes possible were identified. Once that process was complete I categorized data into code families or networks.

Networking and Thematizing

Codes were categorized into code families and networks once they were fully developed and clarified. Code families were analyzed so that themes could be developed, which were based on the patterns across data sources. In addition the data from the documented analysis, or review of transcripts, were summarized. The themes and categories were analyzed in relation to those identified in the literature review, along with highlighting novel ones.

Summary

Through an ethnographic case study the researcher focused on Latino males students age 18 to 24 with a criminal record in an effort to develop an understanding of the factors including social constructs that impact the educational progress of these individuals earning a high school diploma. Through a series of two interviews and a transcript analysis data was analyzed based on ten individual experiences to address a gap

in literature on supporting males with a criminal record obtaining their high school diploma. Key findings from this study are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

Purpose

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to understand the personal perspectives and experiences of Latino males 18 to 24 years of age with a criminal record to gain rich knowledge about ways to better support them in their aspirations to earn a high school diploma and to pursue post-secondary educational and career opportunities. Scholarly literature has demonstrated that completing a high school education provides life-changing opportunities to those previously engaged in the criminal justice system, including more job prospects, life skills, and social stability (Case, Fassenfest, Sarri, & Phillips, 2005). Older youth have limited options for completing a high school education after incarceration even though national research repeatedly supports prevention as an effective strategy for young men of color.

In order to identify effective strategies for overcoming previously incarcerated Latino males' educational barriers, we must understand their early and secondary educational experiences. That understanding should include identifying the perceived barriers to a quality education and the types of programs and service components believed to have been most helpful to accessing post-incarceration high school educational opportunities. The current study aimed to gain this understanding by exploring the perceptions of 10 Latino males aged 18 to 24 years with a criminal history through a series of two interviews and school transcript analysis. This chapter discusses the key findings from this qualitative data collection process.

Research Questions

The study examined the following overarching research question: What are the demographic and programmatic factors that contribute to previously incarcerated Latino males' educational attainment? The specific sub-questions that guided this study are:

1. What demographic factors, such as race, class, gender, and age, interfere with, or alternatively, contribute to the attainment of a high school diploma by Latino males with criminal records?
2. What ways do educators influence the education of Latino male students with a criminal record?
3. What types of programs and program components, such as mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and other supportive services, result in gains toward a high school diploma for Latino male students with a criminal record?
4. What environmental factors, such as employment, community, family, and peer association, influence Latino male students with a criminal record in making gains toward their high school diploma?

Participants

The 10 individuals who participated in this study attended Resiliency Academy, a leadership development program that partners with a project-based charter school located in the Greater Los Angeles area of California. Individual participants were selected using criterion sampling that includes the following: Latino, male, age 18 to 24 years, in process of pursuing a high school diploma, and having a juvenile or adult criminal record. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used when discussing the results of the study to protect the privacy of the participants. Although the study was open to those

aged 18 to 24, some ages were not represented. Individuals could not participate in the study because they had current pending cases. This further limited the sample.

Participant Profiles

Individual participant profiles provided insight into the unique experiences of each participant that are central to the shared phenomenon of education. The profiles below provide data on significant experiences related to family, education, criminal activity, and other variables. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the age and the juvenile and adult offences of each participant, which only include criminal acts that received a guilty verdict. All criminal charges were self-disclosed by the participants, and age was verified via transcript review. Although the current researcher’s intention was to only include individuals 18 – 24 years of age, 50% of participants were 22 years old and, the ages ranged from 19 to 22 years, with no participants 18, 20 or 23 years if age. Six of the 10 participants had adult criminal records even though all had juvenile records.

Table 4.1. Participants at a Glance

Name	Current Age	Age of First Offense	Juvenile Offenses	Adult Offences
Oscar	24	17	0	3
Daniel	22	16	1	1
Ignacio	22	13	3	0
Luis	24	15	5	2

Anthony	19	16	2	0
Kevin	22	13	4	0
Victor	22	16	3	1
Michael	19	13	5	0
Gilbert	21	15	1	1
Ben	24	20	0	1

All 10 participants had multiple life events and community and family risk factors that typically place children and youth at high risk for negative outcomes. They each had a history of disrupted family life, drug and gang involvement, many moves to new homes, neighborhoods, and schools, and failed to have a steady relationship with their biological father or a key adult male figure. All participants had either witnessed domestic violence in the home and/or had been the recipient of it, and 60% of participants had one or more children or step-children, and tended not to be married to or living with the mother of their biological children. Some had one or more parents who were substance abusers, and most were from single mother homes, and all but one of the participants had multiple criminal charges as either a minor and/or adult as depicted in Table 1. Participant profiles provide a brief overview of some significant experiences that have impacted the criminal activity and education of the individuals in the study.

Oscar. Oscar began high school in 2004 and was 24 years old at the time of the interview. As a youth, he moved several times and he described the neighborhoods he lived in as poor, primarily inhabited by Latinos, and high-crime areas. After his father was deported for selling drugs, Oscar decided to work rather than pursue his education. He was in the ninth grade and 15 years old when he dropped out of school, and at the age of 17, he was charged with his first criminal offense and sentenced as an adult. In the subsequent two years, Oscar had two additional criminal charges brought against him, and for all three charges, for which he served time in prison; he stated he was protecting a family member in each instance. Upon his third prison release, he made an effort to separate himself from those family members and friends that he viewed as negative influences. At the age of 23, Oscar began to attend Resiliency Academy, and it took him approximately two years to earn his high school diploma. He graduated in June 2015 and began college classes shortly thereafter with the goal of pursuing a career as a Wildland Firefighter. Oscar stated that he was motivated to succeed because he wants to set a positive example for his daughter and four stepchildren.

Daniel. Daniel began high school in 2006 and was 22 years old at the time of his participation in the study. As a child and teenager he moved twice, and both moves were related to the award of his custody to his aunt. Daniel described the neighborhoods he grew up in as relatively benign; particularly the predominantly white community he lived in with his aunt. He indicated that when living with his mother, the neighborhood was less safe as it included drug sales and gangs, as well as many families. Daniel had not had any contact with his parents since his aunt began raising him at the age of 11 years. His father had been in prison since he was four years old, and he was not certain of his

mother's location. At the age of 16 he was charged with his first offense after stealing a DVD, although Daniel explained it was not his first crime. His last criminal charge was at the age of 19, which was for vandalism, which resulted in a fine and community service. He attempted to attend continuation schools but was not successful, and dropped out shortly before his eighteenth birthday. At the age of 21 he began to attend Resiliency Academy, and was scheduled to graduate in June of 2016. Daniel stated aspirations to attend college and pursue a business career. At the time of the interviews he was expecting his first child.

Ignacio. Ignacio began high school in 2007 and was 22 years old at the time of his participation in the study. As a child and teenager he recalled seeing his father drink often, and eventually he hung out with older individuals and would drink and use marijuana with them. Ignacio's drug use stopped at the age of 20 when he decided to turn his life around. He frequently got into physical altercations with his father and described the major challenges in his neighborhood as racial tensions between Latinos and Blacks. There was heavy gang activity and violence in his neighborhood, and Ignacio often associated with gang members, many of whom were significantly older than him. He attempted suicide twice as a teenager, and at the age of 12 he was charged with breaking and entering and trespassing. At that time he was required to pay a fine and complete community service. Ignacio had two later criminal charges for possession as a juvenile that resulted in drug classes. At the age of 21 he started to attend Resiliency Academy, and was scheduled to graduate in June 2015. Ignacio has a newborn son, and said he hopes to open his own business.

Luis. Luis began attending high school in 2005 and was 24 years old when he was interviewed for this study. He described the environment he lived in as unhealthy for children, as it was fraught with drugs, alcohol, and gangs. He stated that he spent time with “the wrong crowd” as a youth. Luis moved many times but indicated each neighborhood looked and felt very alike. He was raised by his mom and had limited interaction with his dad, who disappeared when Luis was 12 years old. Luis’s frequent moves meant he changed schools frequently. His first experience with the criminal justice system was at the age of 15. Luis explained that his criminal past initially included more minor infractions such as truancy tickets, that later evolved into drugs and eventually more serious criminal acts of violence. At the age of 18 he was charged as an adult for assault and not long after release Luis was charged with another serious crime that resulted in serving three years in prison. At the time of his participation in the current study, he was on probation, had not been out of prison very long, recently had started Resiliency Academy, and hoped to be off probation within three months. Luis indicated that he visits his two older daughters who live outside of the area via supervised visitation, and stated he was working hard to turn his life around so he can see them more often. He was not certain about what he wants to do in the future other than to spend more time with his girls and get a good job. During his participation in the study, Luis was expecting a daughter with his current girlfriend.

Anthony. Anthony began attending high school in 2011 and was 19 years old at the time of the interview. He described the neighborhood that he grew up in as very violent and said he later moved to an area he viewed as nice, although he felt the schools he attended in the area were not good. Although Anthony never officially joined a gang,

he associated with many gang members, including his sister. He never knew his father and was raised by his mother, who later remarried to his stepfather with whom he did not get along. It was not until this last year that Anthony recognized his stepfather was trying to support him. Anthony described himself as having a lot of anger that he felt stemmed from not knowing his father. Because of his problem behaviors, he changed schools frequently in middle school. He enjoyed tagging and would sneak out at night to do it, which eventually landed him in trouble with law enforcement. Anthony joined a gang because it made him feel powerful. However, after his close friend became heavily involved in drugs, he temporarily disconnected from the gang and school to take care of him. Once his friend was back on his feet, Anthony returned to school and found a job. He felt he grew up a lot when he started living with his girlfriend and her daughter, as he wanted to provide for them and stay out of trouble. He continued to work while attending Resiliency Academy and was on schedule to graduate in June of 2016.

Kevin. Kevin entered high school in 2006 and was 22 years old when he participated in the study. As a child Kevin experienced violence between his mother and stepfather, and was the recipient of his stepfather's physical abuse as well, particularly when Kevin got into trouble. Kevin stopped seeing his biological father at the age of four, and in junior high he was expelled from school, which resulted in a lot of time spent with his aunt. He appreciated staying with his aunt because he felt like a kid. Eventually he moved back with his mom but continued to experience challenges with his stepfather. The family moved a few times, which meant Kevin experienced several school changes. When his mom divorced from his stepfather, Kevin's relationship with both his mom and sister improved. He stated that he used drugs daily, primarily marijuana and mushrooms.

Kevin's first criminal charge was at the age of 13 for taking a BB gun to school, and his second charge was for vandalism and resisting arrest. His third case as a juvenile was for possession of a deadly weapon for taking a pocketknife to school. Kevin was placed on probation for this offense, but violated his probation by smoking marijuana. He became disengaged from education in the sixth grade. Prior to his first semester at Resiliency Academy, he had a two-year gap in education. Kevin said his plan was to attend college after graduating in November of 2015.

Victor. Victor began high school in 2007 and was 22 years old at the time of his participation in the study. Victor's grandmother raised him and they moved often. Although he had contact with his mother, she never had custody of him due to drug charges and being in and out of jail. Other relatives, including aunts and uncles, were also in and out of his life due to their involvement in the criminal justice system. Victor felt that mental illness was a contributing factor for some of his relatives' criminal acts. As a teenager he often ran away because he did not want to be at home, as his grandmother often compared him to his mother, which angered him. His father was never in his life, and he is the oldest of four siblings, all of who were in his grandmother's custody since birth. Victor described being abused by all members of his family either verbally or physically, but often both. His grandmother would often call the police, so law enforcement became something he came to fear. Victor was labeled as suicidal after attempting to kill himself on a few occasions. His first criminal charge was for driving without a license at age 16, followed by a second charge for possession of a deadly weapon and resisting arrest after a violent altercation with his grandmother's boyfriend. Victor also has an adult record for driving with a suspended license for which

he served jail time. He dropped out of school in tenth grade, and at the time of his interview was on track to graduate in June 2015 and had already begun taking college classes.

Michael. Michael entered high school in 2010 and was 19 years old at the time he was interviewed for this study. He attended a variety of high schools that included one in a juvenile facility. His mother raised him after his dad left them at the age of 12, an age at which Michael was exposed to a variety of negative influences including peers, drugs, alcohol, and violence. He became dependent on a wide range of drugs including marijuana, inhalants, coke, ecstasy, prescription pills, and methamphetamine. At the age of 16, he dropped out of high school, but prior to that, at age 14, he had his first criminal charge for breaking into a house, for which he received probation and house arrest. Michael had other charges as a juvenile including truancy tickets, vandalism, and domestic violence. His last charge took place when he turned himself in for violating probation by using drugs, which he did because he felt that was the only way he would get clean. At the time of this study, Michael had been sober for three years. He entered Resiliency Academy at age 19, and expected to graduate in June of 2015. His plans were to attend community college in the Spring 2016.

Gilbert. Gilbert started ninth grade in 2009 and was 21 years old at the time he was interviewed for this study. His mother raised him, but he said she was not home much because she worked a lot. He had not seen his dad since he was 11 years old, and believed he moved back to Mexico. Gilbert often had to care for his younger brother while his mom was working. Gilbert sold drugs to make money and was arrested for possession at the age of 15. As an adult he was charged again with possession with intent

to sell. He often went to school because his clients were fellow students. Gilbert said he even did some of his schoolwork, but found keeping up was hard because he changed schools often. He entered Resiliency Academy at the age of 20 and said he intended to finish his diploma but had been considering going to work in a warehouse so he could help his mom and support his daughter.

Ben. Ben began high school in 2006 and entered Resiliency Academy at the age of 22. His mother raised him, but spent considerable time with his grandparents because of his mom's work schedule. His mother moved Ben and his brothers to a nicer area because they were getting into trouble. He was doing well in school and got involved in a great program, but was not happy with his home life, so he moved out at age 17. His mother did not agree with this arrangement, so she forced him to attend a different school and leave the program, which he said caused him to lose interest in school. Ben ended up moving to Texas for work but eventually lost his job and began to use drugs recreationally, including marijuana, coke, mushrooms, and methamphetamine. He had no financial support from family and stayed with friends when he could or slept in the park. Eventually his cousin took him in and paid him to watch her children, and soon after he entered Resiliency Academy, which was in 2013. At the age of 20, while in school, he was charged with domestic violence, and was court ordered to attend domestic violence classes and to perform community labor. He also had a restraining order against him and was given three years probation. Ben stated that the domestic violence charges were unfounded, but pleaded guilty to avoid a more serious charge and risk going to county jail over a long weekend and losing his job. Upon release, Ben returned to

Resiliency Academy and was scheduled to graduate November 2015. Ben stated he would eventually like to attend college.

Demographic Factors

In order to address the first sub-question regarding those demographic factors, such as race, class, gender, and age, that interfere with, or alternatively, contribute to the attainment of a high school diploma by Latino males with criminal records, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions in a private interview. The goal was to gain an understanding of their background prior to and during their interactions with the criminal justice system. The first interview focused on demographics, while the second explored educational experience and the various and related factors may impact educational attainment for this population. Transcripts from both interviews were used to determine interviewees' perceptions of how demographic factors impacted past and current educational experiences and achievement. To be discussed in more detail below, analysis of interview data revealed that participants perceived social class, race, gender, and age as factors that contributed to their criminal activity and low educational attainment.

Social Class

All participants stated that their family income level had significant impact on their criminal activity, a finding consistent with research that demonstrates the heightened risks associated with poverty and low-income status for Latino students, particularly those living in single-parent homes and with language barriers (Rodriguez, 2008). The interview data revealed that 9 out of 10 participants were raised in single-parent households for all or a large part of their childhood, which participants felt led to unstable

housing. One participant, Luis, shared his childhood experience of not having a steady place to live:

Yeah, I lived in different locations, that's one thing I can remember, even though my childhood was good, we've never had like a steady place. Like, this is home right here for a little bit, then we'll have to move, okay, now this is home for a little bit.

For some of the young men interviewed, the family's low income played a role in unstable housing resulting in their multiple relocations to different schools. Some participants struggled with recalling the number of schools they attended prior to high school. Similarly, low socioeconomic status clearly impacted the kind and amount of adult supervision experienced by interviewees. One participant stated that his mother's struggle to support the family resulted in spending almost no time with her and large amounts of time with others, such as grandparents. He said, "In that area there's a lot of gangs. A lot of violence. I remember like a lot of people abusing drugs. I was mostly with my grandparents growing up. My mom was a single parent. Always working to put food on our table." Several other participants indicated they were unsupervised for long stretches of time each day because their parents had multiple jobs, and they believed the lack of adult supervision provided opportunities to get into trouble. Oscar explained, "You know growing up in a poverty neighborhood, they did what they had to do to try to get money, try and help out their family, and it's easier to get in trouble than do the right thing in neighborhoods like this."

When recalling his criminal activity, Victor reflected on the similar life he and his friends had. "Honestly that's a tough one. I can't really say I've met a friend that never

got in trouble. I think it goes back to my environment. Where I grew up everybody had the same experience since we were poor.” A common pattern across all interviews was participants’ perception of a close association between crime and being poor, and viewing crime either as a means to survive financially (to help support the family) or to establish a support system.

Race

Although the literature repeatedly demonstrates that the school-to-prison pipeline is a path more typical for students of color (Wilson, 2014), the current study’s participants did not directly express their belief that race was a factor that contributed to their lack of educational success. However, they did suggest that race played a role in regards to conflict they experienced at school and in their communities. These conflicts included verbal and physical altercations. For some it directly impacted their educational attainment. Oscar discussed the goals of the typical Hispanic person that lived in his neighborhood and attended his school. “The school I went to was mostly Hispanics. It was Hispanic people trying to make it out of their neighborhood so trying to go to school and actually finish off”. Similar to Oscar participants described education being a way Latinos could obtain more opportunities. However, in addition to this they described challenges that existed within the education setting as a result of being Latino. Anthony described the pressure he experienced as a Latino in one of his high schools:

Well, there was always the different groups, like the Mexicans on one side, Blacks on the other, the Whites on the other, and all the smart people would always be together in the lunch area and start to do their work or something. But I was always, you know, like always with the

cholos and stuff. I think it was because of the violence that we had over there. You know how there's the Mexicans, and how the Blacks they would always fight? Yeah. We were on one station, and they were on the other, and then they would start problems, and then it would start conflict. Yeah, so that was also very distracting. Well, there was always cops standing right there, like around there. There was always a couple cops, and literally the security was always right there, at our spot.

Anthony's experience of racial tension in his school was not a unique experience. Other participants described verbal and physical altercations they experienced at school that impacted their education. Consequences described included detention and suspension. In addition to experiencing challenges with other races participants described a pressure to associate with individuals who looked like them. Ignacio explained, "Gangs started getting involved and what crowd and what color do you represent and blacks and Mexicans." Individuals explained that associating with people was more closely related to race and income. As a result students often associated with individuals who looked like them but were significantly older. This impacted not just their educational experiences but criminal activity. In other words, associating with individuals that were older resulted in exposure and participation in criminal activity. These actions often impacted education.

Gender

The literature points to Latino and African American males' continued struggles with educational attainment at higher rates than other ethnic groups in the United States

(Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Brewster & Bowen, 2004). Although participants did not discuss gender as contributing to their criminal activity and educational attainment, there was a related theme in most of the interviews. All except one participant discussed the lack of a father figure during their adolescence as being a negative factor given they are males. Several of the young men were raised by single mothers and had no relationship with their fathers, while a few had fathers present at times, the relationships were described as sporadic and unstable. Many directly stated that not having a male figure in their life contributed to their criminal activity and related lack of educational attainment. For some participants that impact was clear and strong, as they stated that they initiated criminal activity around the time their fathers disengaged from their lives. Luis describes why he stopped attending school:

I would like say like not having a man to tell me like right from wrong. I'm like it takes man to raise a man. You gotta have a dad in order to be a good man. Like me, I never had my dad around like that so I would say like that had a big thing to do with it. If my dad would see me go down that road, he wouldn't want me to go down that road. Like I know for a fact that if I see my son going down that road I would tell him that the outcomes that come with this type of lifestyle ain't really worth it man. You either end up dead or in jail for life. So, I'd have to say like my dad not being around like he should have had something to do with it.

Although not having a present or stable father was a significant reason expressed for engaging in criminal activity, for the six participants who were fathers, being a parent

was often stated as a motive for returning to school and being educationally successful. Michael explained, "...and my son, I want him to grow up knowing that I passed high school. Maybe he'll understand when I go to college that I'm still attending school, even though I could've just stopped." Each young father in the study stressed the importance of having a relationship with their child and making an effort to be a strong role model.

Age

All but one of the ten participants had a juvenile record, and for many, turning 18 was the point where they began to turn their lives around. When interviewees were asked to describe their first experiences with the criminal justice system, many described being minors but spending time with individuals who were older than them. Some participants felt that engaging in activities with older people aided him in forming friendships, especially when there were no boys their age in the immediate neighborhood or when they were new to a neighborhood. One said, "When I moved to live with my aunt there were older kids in the neighborhood. A lot of them tagged and drank. I never really had friends when I was younger so it was nice to have friends." Interviewees were clear that by spending time with older friends, they became involved in criminal activity and their focus on education diminished. Some participants described being exposed to negative risk factors like drugs and alcohol when associating with an older crowd, and said they were motivated to replicate the criminal behaviors of their older friends or family members. Oscar identified following in his brother's footsteps as a reason for his lack of attention to his education:

I was 13. I was already with a bad crowd. I was following my older brother footsteps which weren't good, he was in a gang. And, I never

got into a gang but I always followed his footsteps. I was doing drugs at the time and I was not going to school, ditching, drinking - I was pretty much not doing good things at that time. Like a year later I had my first kid.

Age was an important factor, as many participants were young when they first associated with and were negatively influenced by older friends, but when they became legal adults, most stopped engaging in criminal activity. In addition, many individuals credit age and life experience to a reason for reengaging and being successful in education. Four participants did not have any charges beyond their juvenile record, and they saw turning 18 as a new opportunity. Kevin shared his emotions after turning 18 when he said, "It hasn't impacted my future goals at all, because my case was closed and everything, the whole file got expunged. So, I had no more record when I became 18. So I had a whole new clean slate." Criminal activity after turning 18 was seen as more dangerous for some participants as they knew the consequences changed. Others reflected on age as a turning point because they recognized that as they became older, their opportunities for a good life lessened.

Well, I'm 22 now and I'm about to be 23 in September. I should have graduated high school in 2010. Should have been in college right now. On my way to possibly getting my own place and out of my mom's house. It's been almost five years after high school and I'm still trying to get my diploma. And it's only because of my own reasons. I messed up in school. I did it to myself. I have no one other

to blame than myself. If I would have paid attention and did what I was supposed to, I wouldn't be in this predicament right now.

Education

Participants held a range of beliefs in regards to their early beliefs regarding the importance of education and the role their parents' educational status had on them. All participants discussed the lack of family and/or parents' educational attainment, and those who had parents who did not graduate high school were still encouraged by their parents or guardians to pursue their education. Many stated that their parents often encouraged them to do better in school than they did. Daniel discussed a typical conversation with his mother:

My mom always told me I needed to stay in school and not drop out like she did. I went to the same school until I moved with my aunt. It was a good school even though the area wasn't very nice. The teachers always took care of me.

None of the 10 participants expressed that they had parents or siblings who had served as a solid example for educational achievement, yet there was a desire to set an example for other family members including siblings, nephews, children, and step-children.

Some students, however, had parents who did not emphasize the importance of education, and they believed that when they avoided school and homework and, instead, were engaging in other activities, there was no consequences. This was in large part due to the fact that many of the parents' of participants did not complete high school.

Anthony explained why he did not feel a need to go to school:

I really felt like I didn't even need to. I really felt like I didn't even want to, because even then, my parents didn't even really ask me that much like, “How come you're not in school?” because I really wouldn't tell them much anyway. But when I finally did leave, and when I came back to the house, they didn't really even really ask me about my education.

Many participants discussed attending several schools prior to high school. Transcript review verified that all participants attended more than one high school prior to enrollment in Resiliency Academy, as illustrated in Table 4.2. Three participants revealed that they engaged in educational programming while incarcerated, which was verified via a transcripts. Some participants had changed schools so many times that they could not accurately or readily recall the number of schools attended. Hence, transcripts were used as the primary source of data for this information. The median number of high schools attended for participants was 5.7. On average a typical student completes high school within four years. These individuals had large gaps in their education and were exposed to more educational settings than a typical student.

Table 4.2. High Schools Attended Prior to Resiliency Academy

Name	Number of High Schools Attended
Oscar	3
Daniel	6
Ignacio	2

Luis	4
Anthony	1
Kevin	3
Victor	4
Michael	10
Gilbert	5
Ben	1

Influence of Educators

The second sub-question addressed participants' perceived influences of various educators, such as teachers, counselors, administrators, and other individuals that work in school settings. The data analyzed for this were derived from the second interview, which focused on the educational experiences of participants prior to and during attendance at Resilience Academy. Two educational groups were identified as significantly impacting participants' educational attainment: teachers and counselors. Interviewees did not typically mention or feel that administrators or other school employees were influential or important. It is important to note that many individuals experienced an increase in positive encounters with educators as they aged. Similar to how age impacted a decrease in crime it also resulted in an increase in teacher and counselor engagement that aligned with their time at Resiliency Academy.

Research suggests that individuals labeled as juvenile offenders are often treated differently based on the stigma associated with criminal activity (Cole & Cohen, 2013), but the results of the current study do not support that, at least with respect to participants' experiences at Resiliency Academy. Responses from the second interview demonstrate considerable variability of experiences with educators prior to and during their education there, although participants recognized the caring support of staff as a whole. One participant stated that "The staff, everyone here knows your story and it's like they're part of your family so they go out of their way to help you."

Interviewees recognized the importance of staff getting to know each person as an individual, and generally referred to staff as a whole, although some statements were about teachers or counselors. Having participants refer to staff as a group suggested that interviewees had positive feelings about staff support as a whole. Luis described the approach staff demonstrated in their support of students:

All my other schools that I attended, especially when I was doing those independent study schools, there wasn't really a lot of support. So there's more support and stuff in this school than if all the other schools I've attended. Staff is cool. They support us a lot. They help us out a lot with what they can. Sometimes they're busy and they can't help us right away but they find time.

In addition to the many statements of a positive and supportive approach to working with students by all Resiliency Academy staff, students provided detailed evidence regarding ways teachers and counselors failed to support them in previous schools. The discussion to follow highlights these primarily negative experiences by type of educator, while

demonstrating the contrasting and largely positive support received at Resiliency Academy.

Teachers

Positive experiences. The most positive perceptions of educator influences were expressed when participants talked about their classroom experiences with teachers at their current school. Two major themes evolved during the interview process: caring and support. Participants repeatedly discussed the importance of teachers caring and being supportive. Students elaborated about caring but explained that in addition to teachers' expression of support and care, holding participants accountable for their own education was important. In addition, participants discussed a willingness to reciprocate that relationship as adults. Michael explained that a teacher held him accountable, yet provided flexibility to support him in being successful in the classroom. He said:

Well, my teachers hold me accountable when they see me falling behind. They'll talk to me and see what they can do. They're pretty flexible when I actually tell them what I go through at home. So I've only gotten extensions a few times. And you know, that was cool cause I kind of got them really last minute, the week after project week. And they still gave me those extensions.

Other participants told similar stories of teachers showing support in other ways. Ben discussed that he found it beneficial that teachers took time to get to know students. He and others expressed that getting to know each student allowed teachers to create an individualized approach based on the student's distinct needs. Ben explained that this is beneficial because teachers become tuned in to when students are struggling. He said:

“Yeah, and even if you don't say anything, some teachers just seem like they'll see you and they'll notice your behavior, your activity might be different so they'll tell you, ‘Is everything okay? If you need anything come talk to me,’ It's very supportive and stuff like that.”

Participants believed overwhelmingly that teachers showed their care by holding them accountable rather than letting them get away with not doing coursework. They viewed this accountability as needing to be coupled with teachers’ open expressions of support and flexibility that requires considering each student’s unique experiences and needs. Interviewees viewed these positive teaching strategies as leading to student buy-in and motivation to meet program expectations. In addition, this system of support assisted them in believing that obtaining a diploma was possible. Participants felt valued as students and learned to appreciate learning for the first time, as described by Victor:

And that's another reason I stayed, because I felt like I had a purpose and every day was like a new learning experience. It's like they really like taught about history and they really made it a fun thing. Learning shouldn't be just so serious. Learning shouldn't be always so typical. Learning shouldn't be so monotone. Learning should actually be fun. You should want to learn. You should enjoy learning. And I did there, and that's what I liked, and it was just a good experience.

Negative Experiences. All participants shared a variety of stories about teachers in previous schools who provided a negative educational experience. Some individuals did have positive experiences with some staff at other schools but the negative

experiences outweighed the positive. Ignacio provided insights into his experience at a prior school when he stated “I don't think they had any impact on my education because at school teachers really wouldn't do nothing.” He further elaborated that he would often leave the classroom because he felt the teacher would not care or notice. Some participants stated that acting out would result in being sent out of the classroom, which meant the teacher did not have to deal with them and they did not have to do the classwork. Anthony explained, “I would talk a lot or not really pay attention, not do my work, or talk back to the teachers, and they would send me out. No real consequences just detention and had to just sit there.” Interviewees largely felt that classroom management methods like sending students to detention never had a positive impact and reflected a lack of teacher support. “It was like, if I disappeared, it's not like any of the teachers would call me and asked me where I am at or why I didn't come,” stated Victor. Most participants said this change in perception of teacher support from mostly positive to negative tended to start in middle. Kevin elaborates on when his challenges with education began in the following statement:

Well, in elementary I had a good school environment in there and everything. I mean, all little kids usually do. Same thing as any elementary would do. From kinder to fifth, I didn't really have any problems. And I didn't really start having problems until sixth grade. That's when I started getting into trouble. Only because me and my teacher weren't seeing eye to eye. So he would pick on me a little more than some of the other students.

Participants' comments throughout the interviews reflected a wide range of negative experiences in the education system beginning in middle school and following them into high school. As will be discussed shortly, they believed that many of these experiences correlated with acting out in school and getting in trouble with the law.

Counselors

Participants identified counselors as crucial to their educational success, and many spoke of the lack of interaction with those they had in previous schools. They spoke about the lack of support and expression of care and concerns, and what they perceived as counselors narrow focus on strictly academic issues and class scheduling. "I had a counselor when I was in high school, but it was for classes. She never really talked to me," said one interviewee. Interviewees perceived counselors in previous settings as having a limited role in supporting them. They relayed a large amount of collective negative experiences with counselors, stating that previous schools' counselors failed to provide any valuable support and that their contact with them had been very limited. Students articulated a different experience with counselors at their current school, as they commonly reported that counselors provided them a sense of support and used meaningful methods of facilitating student motivation to achieve academic goals. Anthony discussed the significance of having a counselor who believes in them, as stated below:

Motivate me, give me advice, and they basically just showed that they really cared about me. They showed me that they really wanted me to get somewhere, and they were making sure that I was taking the right steps to get to where I wanted to be. They would help me out a lot.

Participants explained that counselors at Resiliency Academy instilled a strong sense of support when they went above and beyond expectations of what a counselor would typically do to support students. Daniel provides a strong example of this when he discussed the extent of his counselor's support when he stated, "My counselor here is cool. I even have his cell phone number in case I need something. I never thought someone in a school would care about me once they were off the clock." In addition to counselors being described as accessible and engaging participants shared experiences that demonstrated flexibility by those supporting them. Gilbert mentioned how counselors worked with other staff to support him:

Also the counselor checks on you in class. They know what you are doing cause they talk to your teachers. Like one time I had a group project and it wasn't going good. So I guess my teacher must have told my counselor cause he had my group meet with him so he could help us make a plan. He even stayed after school to help. Actually a lot of staff stay after school if you need help.

Participants had a clear understanding of the purpose of the counselor role, of their efforts to coordinate and work closely with teachers to ensure their academic success, and of their interests in student wellbeing beyond the regular school day. They commonly articulated the need for staff to work together to support a young person, and recognized, as do many experts, that supportive collaboration is key to student success.

Supportive Services

The literature continues to suggest that individuals who involved in the criminal justice system often face challenges with employment, public assistance, housing, and a

variety of other challenges (Legal Action Center Report, 2004). These challenges were explored in this study's third sub-question: What types of programs and program components, such as mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and other supportive services, result in gains toward a high school diploma for Latino male students with a criminal record? The interview questions that addressed it were split between the two interview sessions, and during them participants identified services that had been beneficial to them as well as potentially valuable services that were lacking. The types of services received by interviewees to be the most important to their academic success included training in a variety of areas, employment, college preparation and counseling, and academic support. Three pervasive themes regarding lacking, but needed services emerged across interviews: mentoring, extended day activities, and financial assistance.

Significant Supportive Services

Counseling. Participants identified counseling as a meaningful supportive service. Although participants felt counseling at Resiliency Academy was a vital and supportive service, they perceived counselors at some if not most of their earlier schools as unavailable and overtly task-focused on course scheduling. Counselors were seen as valuable when they were approachable, accessible, and attentive to needs. Oscar discussed the range of counseling that exists at his current site as follows: "Here I have counseling. I have people helping me do my FAFSA, my BOG waiver. I have connections to college. I have connections to the unions." Oscar's example in addition to most other participants' comments clearly reflected the important role that caring counselors take on by serving as a resource link to additional supportive services. Oscar expanded on the support he experienced by one of his current counselors:

The counseling that they have here are real good. They actually get to talk to you, and they don't judge you by your criminal record. They don't judge you by how you look. That's real helpful. Just having somebody to sit there and listen to you. Sometimes that is all it takes. That's why kids act up, because they don't have anybody to sit there and talk to.

Oscar highlights the multiple ways counselors play a meaningful role in students lives – when they care about students, they will go out of their way to get you what they need to be successful while showing they care by being a good listener and not judging students for their past mistakes. Oscar's comment also alludes to a quality that other students also valued, which was the sense that counselors should be (and were at Resiliency Academy) dependable. That often involved not only perceived continual support for each student, but also developing a plan and following up with the student to ensure it is carried out. For many participants, a reliable adult who remained committed to their success was not something they had experienced up until the arrival at the academy, when most were already adults.

Employment and college preparation. Participants expressed challenges that they faced in regards to employment along with hope that earning a diploma will provide access to employment. Although many interviewees were or had recently been employed, their wages were low and the work was inconsistent, with a few mentioning that they were only able to secure jobs under the table. Oscar described a previous job he had that required him to be away from his family for extended periods of time. He stated: So, yeah, it was hard just getting trusted or getting employed so I kept going back to that

one job that didn't really care about my record and the only thing about that is I was traveling too much. I was gone for three months at a time, gone for two weeks, three months at a time and it just wasn't what I wanted. I was away from my family too much, from my kids, and it was really putting lots of stress on my girlfriend. I needed something better.

Other individuals shared similar experiences and identified struggles with obtaining employment. Luis, for example, explained his employment struggles and the way the academy helped him make strides in gaining meaningful employment:

Like I would apply to all these places and it would come down to like the application process, the interview process, then they would see my record and they would deny me work because of that. Here I was able to learn construction. Right now I'm waiting on this guy for this construction job. Construction doesn't care about by record.

Interestingly, negative work experiences and difficulty in finding work resulted in participants' motivation to pursue a college education and/or to take employment preparation workshops and trainings. Several participants offered concrete examples of how attending Resiliency Academy helped them work toward academic and employment goals. For example, Oscar discussed receiving certifications and being accepted to college to pursue a degree in Wildland and Fire. Overall, participants valued the focus on college and career preparation in part because within a relatively short time at the school, many experienced the benefits of these educational offerings. This was especially important for individuals who had adult criminal records that had not been expunged.

Those who still had records felt that college provided more opportunities than just having a high school diploma.

Academic support. Academic support was especially important for participants because they had experienced learning and a range of life challenges prior to dropping out of high school. Table 3 demonstrates the wide variations in the total number of high school credits earned by participants prior to entering Resilience Academy and what they had earned by the time they participated in this study and their anticipated graduation dates. Resiliency Academy required 200 credits distributed across specific subject areas. Individuals were able to gain more support with earning credits due to the small size of the school. It is important to note that many participants had over the required amount of elective credits at the time of participation in this study, as reflected in Table 4.3, which was derived from document analysis of official school transcripts. A few discussed being placed in what counselors described as “easy courses”, which resulted in taking too many units of unnecessary course units and delayed completion of required ones. Some participants also discussed their graduation plan in their interview.

Table 4.3. Course Credit Overview

Name	Credits at Entrance	Current Credits	Age at Entrance	Current Age	Anticipated Graduation Date
Oscar	47	189	23	24	June 2015
Daniel	67	109	21	22	June 2016

Ignacio	162	196	21	22	June 2015
Luis	89	96	24	24	Nov. 2016
Anthony	50	115	17	19	June 2016
Kevin	109	190	21	22	Nov. 2015
Victor	143	257.5	21	22	June 2015
Michael	130	200.5	19	19	June 2015
Gilbert	85	117	20	21	June 2016
Ben	135	178	22	24	Nov. 2015

All participants shared stories of feeling supported in their academic endeavors, and transcripts revealed that many participants had demonstrated significant progress in credit attainment over time. Kevin explained his perspective on academic support from teachers:

Even though some students still do have some trouble, and they do get that little extra help, the teachers make sure that they put forth that effort to help us understand and that's what I like here because, no matter what, they always try to make sure we understand our work.

Support varied in regards to the specific techniques used by teachers for keeping students focused. Teachers were seen as being highly sensitive to when students were struggling but were unable to express it. Participants also reported that teachers at the academy were skilled in using motivational language to keep them moving forward at key times. Ben shared a typical conversation he has experienced with a teacher:

Yeah, and even if you don't say anything, some teachers just seem like they'll see you and they'll notice your behavior, your activity might be different so they'll tell you, "Is everything okay? If you need anything come talk to me".

Ben's comment is reflective of what other student's said about teacher's ability to pick up on their state of mind. This approach allowed teachers to best support individuals and their needs. Some of this support extended beyond purely academics, as many participants felt teachers supported them in their personal lives, and felt that care and concern about personal or life issues contributed to their feeling more supported in the classroom. Those students who felt teachers and other staff were willing to provide emotional support appeared more willing to trust them and the academy. Participants explained that they were more willing to listen to a staff about additional support or services when they trusted them. If a student was having a challenging time it was the teachers that they trusted that were able to help them overcome the challenge.

Training. Participants discussed the wide range of training they have received in their educational settings. Participants explained the value of diverse trainings they have experienced. Specifically, they valued the emphasis on work and post-secondary preparation. Participants described the trainings that they experienced and valued. Some examples of training experiences shared during interviews were restorative justice workshops, construction skills training, public speaking, financial literacy courses, life skills, and community development. Luis discussed the benefits of these trainings when he said, "Like a lot of self-development like boost your self-esteem, boost your motivation and your drive to continue to get your education and stuff like that". Luis

discussed the intrinsic result of the workshops. Similar to what other individuals expressed he explained the additional benefit of motivation that he gained. This motivation provided the potential to accomplish other goals. Ignacio also shared his perspective on the benefits of trainings when he stated, “I think programs, such as the program I am in - I think they help a lot because they teach people values, and they teach that everyone is the same, we are just different skin color.” Participants were able to connect the trainings to real life experiences and needs, so they clearly understood the benefits to participation. Participants viewed the value of trainings as extending well beyond professional development and into personal growth. Ben discussed the value of the restorative justice process as “something we have in this program that is there to help solve problems. If you have problems with a teacher, or you have a problem with a student, a staff member. What it is, is kinda like a mediation. It would be like we try to talk our problems out and see if we could restore.” In addition to Ben, two other participants discussed the benefits of Restorative Justice. Individuals felt that Restorative Justice gave them the tools to work through disagreements and conflicts in a positive manner.

Filling Gaps in Supportive Services

Although participants readily identified the kinds of support they currently receive from Resiliency Academy, three themes emerged in regards to types of lacking support that they felt would be beneficial to their growth and success: mentoring, extended day activities, and financial support.

Mentoring. Although most participants did not identify a specific need for a mentor, they recognized the need for a positive role model from whom they can gain

support, communicate with about personal issues, and guide them in navigating the work world. Only one participant, Gilbert, directly referred to the desire for a mentor when he said, “I want to have someone who knows what I've been through and can help be get to the next level umm like I think they call them mentors.” Other individuals used different language but shared in the belief that having a person they could learn from and lean on for support was needed and would have been beneficial to their wellbeing.

A few participants were exposed to alumni on campus, who took on some aspects of a mentoring role and were viewed as a source of support. “Alumni’s come and don’t want to leave. They are good people to talk to. And, I believe if you do take advantage of this program you could either find employment, or find a really good post-secondary education”. In addition to alumni, some individuals spoke about Resilience Academy staff as role models, and male teachers and staff were viewed as personally meaningful ones. For example Ignacio said, “It is good to have guy teacher that I can talk to most of my teachers were female. Not that they are bad but they just don't get it. You know a man can understand where a man is coming from.”. Given the lack of fathers and father figures in the interviewees’ lives, it is not surprising that participants spoke of the potential benefits of and desire for positive male figures.

Extended Day Activities. Participants spoke in great detail about the need to stay busy in order to stay out of trouble. Most of perceived that when they had free, unstructured time prior to Resiliency Academy, they were more likely to engage in criminal activity and problematic behaviors. Anthony discussed that the best prevention method to help individuals from reengaging in crime as follows:

Yeah, just keeping themselves busy, or a job or something. Doing those little side jobs. I think mainly what they do need is attention of their families. Because if they really don't have that attention, then they feel like they don't really care. Then they are like, "Whatever, I'll go find someone that does." That's when they start turning to all that stuff. So I think the strategy would be sports.

Although some participants indicated they had participated in some extra curricular activities, they argued for there were too few options. Gilbert represented most of the others when he indicated that there was only one specific sport in which students could participate at his original high school, and financial issues got in the way of being able to pay for and enroll in non-school sports. Aside from expressing that more options for sports activities would have made a difference in their lives, some also spoke of having jobs available clubs, and any opportunities that would keep them busy.

The concern for filling time outside of school and even work with valued activities was expressed as well. Even though the interviewees each had made considerable educational strides, they recognized that in part what they needed to continue down a healthy path included having their time occupied as much as possible and being engaged in fun and meaningful activities. However, the challenge was that for most of these young men, the opportunities to do so did not exist or were not affordable.

Financial Support Needs. Although participants identified several services and benefits they currently receive at or through Resilience Academy, many spoke to the realities of struggling financially, which mirrored the economic challenges of their childhood and adolescent years. Some of the financial issues are not only tied to low

personal income, but also to living in communities with high poverty. Oscar described a recent economic setback that was unrelated to his more recent successes in school as follows:

It makes me feel bad because that is all I can afford right especially with somebody just broke to my house last weekend and stole my truck and that is my kid's home. So they took more than just our truck and some of our belongings, they took our security. How we feel comfortable at the house so we tell the kids, because we tell them everything, we don't want to keep them in the shadows.

Interviewees expressed that they dealt with financial needs in the past by engaging in criminal activities, and they want to avoid that approach now. In a more indirect way, their comments suggested that as they pursue an education and eventual job stability, their continual struggles with financial instability were a problem. Programs that provide higher pay work while they are in school and/or stipends or other forms of financial assistance were identified as needed.

Environmental Factors

The fourth and final sub-question asked interviewees about the environmental factors, such as employment, community, family, and peer association, that they believe influenced them and other Latino male students with a criminal record in making gains toward a high school diploma. The data from this question were derived from the second interview (Appendix D). Although participants varied in their perceptions of environmental influences, which were largely negative and included friends, educational setting, drugs, and violence, there was one factor that was consistent across all participants: the need for a reliable support system. Much of what has been discussed

under previous sub-questions relates to this questions. Friends, drugs and violence are two common themes that were discussed in great detail in relation to environmental factors that influenced educational attainment.

Friends

Participants described the negative influences of friends on their criminal activity and lack of focus and success in school. They often revealed that some of the people they had associated with were not “real friends”, and reconnecting with them after release from prison tended to be problematic. Luis reflected on how former friends negatively impacted his decisions upon release:

I got out. I was on probation. I was doing good. I was on track. What happened? I don't remember what happened. Oh, I had got in contact with some old friends from my younger days and I started hanging with them.

Although some participants had considerable gaps in time between episodes of criminal activity, they suggested that they returned to criminal behaviors because of those with whom they associated. Several participants spoke about associating with negative influences because doing so resulted in a strong sense of belonging. “With the gang, it just felt like more power, and respect. Because when I would walk down the street, I felt good,” said Anthony.

Interviewees often spoke of a shift in friends when they had begun to turn their lives around. Anthony later elaborated on his current friends, who he met at Resilience Academy, and the influence they have had on him when stated, “I think it's a lot of fun here, like positive vibes, good influences, good friends. Yeah, it's just really good.” The

data suggest that a combination of letting go of old friends while making new, healthier friends was important to participants' ability to transition from criminal activity and school failure to a healthier lifestyle and desire to pursue an education. Ignacio discussed his lack of desire to hang out with former friends when he mentioned, "I don't hang with the people I did before now. I hang out with people that come here. They know how it is but want to do better." This comment exemplifies interviewees' collective views that when they finally desired to change their lives, they understood they needed to begin to associate with individuals on similar paths.

Drugs and Violence

For all participants, drugs and/or violence were perceived to contribute to their criminal activity and lack of educational attainment when they first entered ninth grade. Despite significant educational and personal gains, they continued to struggle with moving away from drugs and violence. This is not surprising given most participants grew up in households filled with these unhealthy experiences. In some instances, memories of drugs and violence were tied to deeper issues, like painful childhood memories and a sense of instability and the anxiety it can generate. Hence, interviewees commonly used drugs themselves to escape reality and to cope, and continued to struggle with finding healthy alternatives to dealing with social-emotional pain. Ignacio explained his experience with drugs:

I think drugs were just so easy to come across and I would feel good when I would get high and when I would get drunk. I'd feel good and I'd have an escape from my actual real world that I was living like at home because I had lot of problems with my dad. He was an alcoholic

and I think the drugs gave me an escape so I think that's why I kept doing the drugs.

Ignacio's example represents not only the pattern of self-medicating with drugs by interviewees themselves and family members, but also highlights that their homes did not have any adults that actively discouraged drug use.

Violence was a reason for many participants' school suspensions and expulsions. In addition to experiencing or witnessing violence at school, many saw violence in their communities and homes. Ignacio recounted the abuse he experienced from his father whenever he would get in trouble. "My mom, she grounded me for like a month and my dad when he got home, I think he grabbed a metal belt and started whipping me with the metal belt. And I think that went on for like 20 minutes." In addition to experiencing violence, many participants shared stories of how they engaged in violent acts. These acts included physical altercations with parents, fist fights with classmates and physical interactions in their communities. "I was probably a bit more violent too there, because I was growing up and your mentality just starts to get into that teenager mentality," stated Anthony. A few participants credit anger management and Restorative Justice as their alternatives to violence. Suvall (2009) describes Restorative Justice as an alternative to hold individuals accountable while still providing strategies to reintegrate them into the larger community.

Conclusion

The Latino males with a criminal record in this study were able to articulate the reasons behind their criminal activity and challenges faced in the educational system with family, friends, and the community. Nine of the ten participants had juvenile records.

Individuals share a similar background coming from low-income, often single-mother households and averaged 5.7 schools in their high school career prior to their current educational setting. Student profiles shed light on the wide range of challenges Latino males with a criminal history have experienced and the factors impacting their criminal activity and educational success.

Clear themes emerged in regards to each of the study's sub-questions.

Demographic variables of race, class, gender, and age had various influences on individuals and directly impacted the likelihood they engaged in criminal activity. For most participants social class was a contributing factor to engage in criminal activity. This criminal activity then effected their education. In regards to age, gender and race these factors impacted who participants associated with. These associations often impacted their lack of educational attainment and increased criminal activity.

In addition participants were able to articulate ways specific educators, primarily teachers and counselors, impacted their educational attainment. Two major themes that emerged in regards to meaningful educational relationships were those that demonstrated caring and support. Students were able to discuss and identify the kinds of supportive services they felt had the greatest impact on the successes in working toward their high school diploma. Specifically they recognized a need for additional supportive services falling into the areas of mentoring, extended day activities, and financial assistance. Lastly, environmental factors that impact education were discussed to understand how to better support these young people. The qualitative data from this study identified a wide range of factors, both past and present, that were perceived to influence interviewees'

progress toward earning a high school diploma and considering a post-secondary education.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The final chapter will provide a brief overview of the study. Included in this overview will be a discussion of the problem, purpose, research questions, methodology and major findings. An in-depth discussion of the findings will be presented that detail significant results from the study as well as an analysis of the data. Implications on policy and practice will be shared along with recommendations for future research.

Problem

Approximately half of the Latinos that enter high school in the United States will not graduate. Yet 1 in 6 Latino males in the U.S. will enter the prison system in their lifetime (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Once a male of color commits a crime they have a 50% chance of returning to criminal behavior (Abrams, Terry, & Frankie, 2011). For many young Latino men the school-to-prison pipeline begins years prior to them committing their first offense (Wilson, 2014). Wilson (2014) discusses the vast amount of policies and practices that create a system that establishes the school-to-prison pipeline. Although literature supports the existence of the school-to-prison pipeline and the negative impact it has had on young men of color little has been done to stop it (Cole & Cohen, 2013). Once they have entered the criminal justice system, strategies must be identified to support young men in order to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline in an effort to stop the cycle of incarceration.

Purpose

The purpose of this ethnographic case study is to understand the personal experience of Latino males, age eighteen to twenty-four, with a criminal record; in order to gain insight into how to best support them in obtaining their high school diploma. In

order to identify strategies to best support students with a criminal record, one must understand effective methods that are successful with the Latino criminal justice population. For this reason, it is important to recognize informants' perspectives of their educational experiences including potential educational barriers, early and current experiences with the criminal justice system, perceived challenges, and most effective educational strategies for this population.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study focus on examining the educational experience of Latino males with a criminal record. The overarching research question is: What are the demographic and programmatic factors that contribute to previously incarcerated Latino males' educational attainment? The specific sub-questions that guide this study are:

1. What demographic factors, such as race, class, gender, and age, interfere with, or alternatively, contribute to the attainment of a high school diploma by Latino males with criminal records?
2. In what ways do educators influence the education of Latino male students with a criminal record?
3. What types of programs and program components, such as mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and other supportive services, result in gains toward a high school diploma for Latino male students with a criminal record?
4. What environmental factors, such as employment, community, family, and peer association, influence Latino male students with a criminal record in making gains toward their high school diploma?

Methodology

The site selected for this study was Resiliency Academy, a location that had experience working with individuals with a criminal history. Purposeful criteria sampling was used to identify males, Latino, age 18 to 24, with a history of being involved in the criminal justice system, and currently pursuing a high school diploma. Individual student experiences were the primary source of data, collected via two personal interviews that focused on their criminal and education history as well as other related environmental factors. In addition, an academic transcript analysis was done to gain a better understanding of educational history. Data was coded and analyzed to determine themes and key findings related to relevant literature and the research questions.

Major Findings

All participants in this study were able to contribute and discuss their individual experience as it related to criminal history and education. Findings from this study provide insight in understanding the phenomenon of many young Latino males' engaging in criminal activity and related challenges in earning a high school diploma. Individuals explained challenges they experienced in the education system as well as how family, friends and the community impacted academic attainment. The obstacles interviewees shared were not based on isolated incidents, but rather a series of experiences that supported being disengaged in school and participating in criminal activity and other risk factor behavior. Often these barriers took place in a wide range of institutional settings and involved different individuals in their lives including peers, family and other community members. Students shared similar backgrounds including growing up in low-income homes, being raised in single-parent households, attending a variety of

educational settings and experiencing a wide range of challenges during adolescence. For most, these experiences began in childhood and continued throughout adolescence. In regards to criminal activity, 80% of participants had a juvenile record, 60% of participants had an adult record while 40% had both.

Within the first sub-question a variety of themes emerged. Demographic variables such as race, class, gender and age had various levels of impact on education and criminal activity depending on the individual. Social class was the variable most consistently described as a contributing factor. Social class significantly impacted participants because it had a direct connection to every aspect of their lives including: living conditions, access to education, and parent's employment; in addition to a variety of other factors. These above factors associated with social class thereby impacted other demographic variables including education. Specifically, social class impacted criminal activity that then impacted education. All participants recalled incidents where their social class played a role in impacting their education. Age, race, and gender contributed to peer association. These peer associations impacted behavior in educational setting as well as the community. Associations were often a major contributing factor that increased criminal activity. For many, associating with older individuals at a young age exposed them to risk factor behavior that they may not have been exposed to if associating with peers their age that were not engaging in risk factor behavior. Interviewees often associated with individuals engaging in risk behavior because it provided them with a sense of belonging. In order to maintain many of these relationships it meant participating in the same risk behavior as their peers.

Participants were also able to identify teachers and counselors as educators who played a significant role in impacting their educational attainment. Caring and support were two themes that emerged. Especially, in regards to counselors and teachers developing a relationship with a young person seemed to positively impact their education. Individuals identified supportive services they felt had the greatest impact on making gains toward their high school diploma such as: training in a variety of areas, employment, college preparation, counseling, and academic support. In addition, they discussed categories including mentoring, extended day activities and financial assistance as areas requiring more support. Environmental factors that impact education were recognized as both past and present influences that influenced making gains toward earning a high school diploma.

Discussion

The conceptual framework guiding this study drew from the work of Crenshaw's (1989) notion of intersectionality, a term that identifies the manner in which social constructs impact individual lives (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) explains that social constructs are categories such as race, gender, and sexual identity that have been created within society that are often used to describe a particular group based on perceived shared experiences. Social constructs are often interconnected and based on individual experiences that have the ability to impact lives in different ways. Intersectionality was used to account for the varied experience of Latino males with a criminal record pursuing their high school diploma. Through the participation of ten young men with a criminal history a better understating of a larger phenomenon of young Latino males interaction with the criminal justice system and related challenges in

earning a high school diploma occurred. The study focused on how social constructs impacted individuals engaging in criminal activity and disrupted their previous educational experience as well as their current reengagement in the education system. Students discussed the factors they perceived as reasons for criminal activity, recidivism and its relation to educational attainment. Although experiences varied individuals shared similar barriers such as low-income, single-parent homes, juvenile records, and education instability. Figure 5.1 demonstrates the various social constructs that have contributed to individuals' pursuit for their high school diploma. Trahan (2011) explains that although certain demographic factors can be linked to certain barriers an individual's identity is developed based on a variety of social constructs. Although half of the Latino students who enter high school will drop out or be pushed out of the education system there are a variety of social constructs that also have the potential to impact this outcome (Rodriguez, 2008). Criminal activity is not viewed as a social construct however, it has the ability to be impacted by social constructs and therefore impact educational attainment (Figure 5.1).

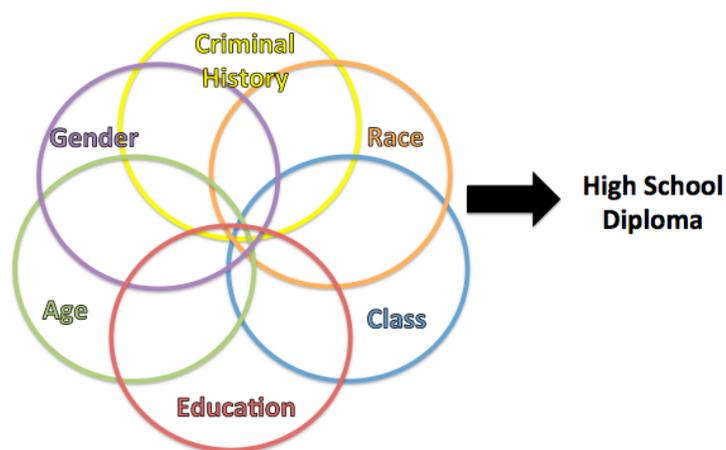


Figure 5.1: Modified framework for the current study based on Crenshaw (1989).

Demographic Factors

The school-to-prison pipeline is the result of a wide range of factors including interactions with key people (friends, associates, educators, probation officers, social workers, etc.), family experiences (poverty, housing, parent-child relationships, etc.) and systems (Osher, Coggshall, Colombi, Woodruff, Francois, & Osher, 2012; Cole & Cohen, 2013). Rodriguez (2008) discussed how Latino males are more likely than their counterparts to drop out of high school. However, he also explained that correlating risk factors such as low-income and single-parent homes can contribute to dropping out for Latino males. Males in this study attributed social class (low-income) and living in a single-parent homes as contributing factors to their criminal activity and lack of educational attainment. In particular, they explained having more time to associate with peers engaging in risk factor behavior when parents were working long hours or held multiple jobs. In addition, the informants in the study identified the lack of a male figure, specifically a father, as a major contributing factor to engaging in criminal activity and disengaging in school. As Luis stated, “I would like say like not having a man to tell me like right from wrong. I'm like it takes man to raise a man” (July 1, 2015). The study revealed, 9 of 10 participants discussed living in a single-parent home at some point during adolescents. Although it is uncertain if having a father figure would have resulted in different life choices many participants felt that it would have. For many individuals that participated in this study, they had a desire to have a male role model in their lives since this is something they lacked. Some discussed still wanting to experience this type of relationship in a mentoring capacity. Participants in the study with children identified being a father as a reason for reengaging in school. The importance of being a good

father was linked by participant's experience of not having a father in their lives. Individuals shared the importance of this role and a desire to guide their children in a positive direction. All participants with children described their children as one of or the only reason for reengaging in the education system. For participants education was a method to influence their children's lives in a positive direction as well as their lives.

The findings revealed that social class was a social construct that contributed to criminal activity that impacted educational attainment. The participants identified social class as a contributing factor to their behavior. Social class impacted a wide range of factors in student's lives including: housing, nourishment, and access to education, supportive services, and parent involvement due to employment among other factors. In particular, each shared multiple stories that attributed social class as a reason why they behaved in a particular fashion. Individuals discussed living in single parents homes where they were often unsupervised because their parent had to work long hours or held multiple jobs. This unsupervised time provided opportunities for interviewees to engage in crime, drugs and other risk factors. Caldwell & Altschuler (2001) describe risk factors as any circumstances (individual or environmental) that increase youths' likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors. Each participant shared numerous instances where they engaged in risk behavior due to lack of supervision. In addition, social class created a sheltered environment where individuals were exposed to a large amount of risk factor behaviors and a lack of opportunities. Often, the opportunities available in school were not available to these students because of their behavior. Many expressed a desire to participate in extra curricular activities but did not qualify due to their behavior and

grades. This institutionalized oppression only further fueled the school-to-prison pipeline.

Ehrenreich et al. (2012) explained a range of reasons that individuals disengage in high school including poor school connections and family. Individuals often seek a support network in another area when they are unable to find this at home or in a school. Participants identified a range of reasons why they had to relocate and acclimate to a variety of educational settings. One of the challenges they described as a result of moving was finding associates or friends. In this study age, race, and gender contributed to peer association because participants associated with individuals they could identify with. In other words, they found friendships with people they thought were like them in appearance, behavior and social class background. These associations often led to criminal behavior and challenges in schools. It is not surprising that 90% of participants began their criminal activity in adolescence. Greenwood (2008) explains that it is in adolescence that individuals begin to develop their criminal career. For many individuals in the study criminal activity stopped once they reached adulthood. This was linked to an understanding that consequences as an adult offender would be more extreme. Only 60% of participants were charged with criminal activity as an adult.

Influence of Educators

Research shows that lack of support from educational staff can be a contributing factor to dropping out (Christle et al. 2007). Data from this study supported this. Individuals described a wide range of examples of staff demonstrating lack of support in educational settings. When discussing what staff played a significant positive influence on their education participants identified teachers and counselors. Two significant

themes emerged during this study that related to how teachers and counselors demonstrate these actions through care and support. Wilson (2014) identifies five variables that can change the school-to-prison pipeline: (a) eliminate zero tolerance, (b) increase personal efficacy, (c) generate systematic change, (d) community support, and (e) youth engagement (p.52). When discussing the role of teachers and counselors participants described tolerance, confidence, belief, accountability and high expectations to demonstrate their care and support of them. These above values are aligned with the areas that educators can influence within an educational setting that can disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline as described by Wilson (2014). If individuals are engaged in school they are less likely to reengage in criminal activity if the school provides access to learning and supportive services. Sander et al. (2011) discussed the connection between low educational performance and involvement in criminal activity. Sander's (2011) above research findings was supported by the descriptions shared by participants in regards to the education they received when engaging in criminal activity and the education they are currently receiving now. It is important to acknowledge that for many participants they were more willing to develop relationships with educators as adults. It is possible that similar relationships may have been available to individuals in the past but they were not open to receiving them due to existing barriers and challenges in their life.

Supportive Services

Wildeman and Western (2010) explain that a criminal record impacts an individual long after release. It has the ability to impact their health, resources and relationships (Wildeman and Western, 2010). It is for this reason that additional

supportive services are essential for young men with a criminal history. Interviewees discussed the following as crucial in contributing to their academic success: training in a variety of areas, employment, college preparation, counseling, and academic support. Moody et al. (2008) explains that a student must feel that a program brings them value. If they experience value in their program they are less likely to reoffend (Moody, Kruse, Nagel, & Conlon, 2008). The above services were described by participants as ways in which they benefited from their current educational setting in the area of supportive services. Three themes emerged in regards to areas where students require additional supportive services: mentoring, extended day activities, and financial assistance.

Environmental Factors

Sharkey et al. (2003) explains that risk factors for recidivism can be “any influence in a youth’s life, whether biological, behavioral, environmental, socio-cultural, or demographic that increases the probability of a negative outcome” (p. 468). Similar to these finding data from this study described environmental influences that included friends, educational setting, drugs, and violence. A consistent theme that emerged was a need for a support system to aid in overcoming these aforementioned challenges. For many participants with age came a shift in identifying a support network. Individuals shifted friendships to peers with similar goals as opposed to peers who engaged in behavior individuals were engaged in previously. In addition, some disassociated with family members while other reestablished healthy relationships with their family. These changes in family relationships were dependent on family being supportive of their educational goals.

Limitations

Although research from this study aligned with existing research in regards to supporting individuals with a criminal record the study focused on one setting with a particular age range of 18 to 24. In addition, individuals with current cases pending were excluded. Lastly, the study had a limiting time frame to collect data. However, the study provided data that contributed to the research literature and knowledge about the barriers students with criminal records encounter when accessing a quality and relevant education. Further, the data from this study suggested that individuals who experience relevant educational supports in an educational setting have the potential to overcome various barriers and make gains toward their high school diploma. However, the most critical factor is having knowledgeable and experienced teachers and staff that demonstrate a willingness to care and support students with a variety of needs. In addition, supports must consist of a wide range of services to address past trauma and experiences in addition to current educational barriers.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Based on the research findings reveal that individuals with a criminal record require a wide range of supports to address their individual needs while reengaging in education. Although participants had common experiences that impacted their criminal behavior and education individual experiences varied. The data revealed that it is important when supporting students with a criminal record that their previous challenges, such as surviving child abuse, having a history of drugs or alcohol, and other trauma be acknowledged and programmatically addressed. Although common themes are apparent the impact an individual feels an experience has on their life differs from participant to participant. Individuals in this study spoke of the disengagement they felt while

attending traditional school settings or continuation schools. Although a variety of factors contributed to negative educational experiences at other educational settings. However, Resiliency Academy created an environment in which students were able to experience success. This success is attributed not just to academic gains but having an education setting that acknowledged past and present barriers and created services to support these areas. Although unable to eliminate past experiences having strategies and methods to combat them allowed individuals the opportunity to feel like they could achieve gains toward their high school diploma.

Similar programs may want to consider if they have necessary supportive services and staff in place to address the wide range of needs such as unstable housing, drugs or alcohol abuse, and unemployment. Although teachers may have preparation such as a teaching credential they may lack the experience or training to support young men with a criminal record. Often teachers are exposed to concepts like diversity when they are preparing to be a teacher however, this formal training often does not include teaching students with a criminal record. Students who participated in this study described staff at their current setting that had teaching strategies to address their needs. Identifying needs of this student population can be done in a variety of formal and informal ways including individual and focus group interviews as well as intake surveys. Important services to incorporate include a wide range of professional development workshops both in the area of life skills and career development including post-secondary preparation. In addition, program leadership needs to consider developing a mentoring component. The majority of participants identified a need for a positive male role model. "I want to have someone who knows what I've been through and can help be get to the next level umm like I think

they call them mentors”, Gilbert. In addition, participants with children discussed a need to be a good father and taking responsibility for their children. Yet, informants lack father figures or male mentors in their own life as adolescents. Incorporating a mentoring program or parenting classes could assist young fathers in creating healthy relationships with their children.

Kim et al. (2007) explains that within education as whole students have begun to seek alternative forms of education to address their individual needs. This is especially important to individuals with a criminal record in that they tend to have a history of negative interactions with a traditional educational setting. These negative experiences tend to be magnified with the addition of environmental barriers. As a result positive educational experiences are sometimes minimized. It is for this reason that strategies must be developed to aid participants in overcoming trauma and planning for the future. This might be done via staff training, working collaborative with other stakeholders (probation officer, social workers, etc.) or partnering with other agencies for mentoring or supportive services (drug counseling, domestic violence support group, parenting classes, etc.). Coordinated services are cost effective and allow for the best possible outcome for youth and adults. Moreover, partnering agencies are able to coordinate resources to create opportunities and develop a plan that targets the educational needs of the individual. This study revealed, resources are often not coordinated by local agencies and at times an individual receives duplicate services while lacking others. Therefore, it is important to ensure that young people involved in the criminal justice system experience a smooth transition to reengage in the education system. In order for this to occur, programs may consider working with individuals prior to release. This would mean

beginning the transition into their education program prior to release. This could have the potential to decrease the probability of them reengaging in at risk behavior. Programs should also consider having a range of strategies that are available during regular school hours and beyond. This would support individuals in occupying time so they have less off task behavior.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study yielded important findings to contribute to a greater phenomenon of supporting Latino males, 18 to 24, with a criminal record pursuing their high school diploma the duration of the study was limiting. The data collection process occurred over the course of two months making it difficult to expand the sample size of ten. It would be important to replicate this study with a larger sample size over an extended period of time that examines the high school educational re-engagement to high school diploma completion process. This would allow for a deeper understanding of their current educational experience in comparison to their previous educational experiences.

In addition, it would be of value to do a comparative study of similar programs serving similar populations in a variety of setting and states. These settings could vary in regards to the age group they serve. The research findings could provide strategies that demonstrate program effectiveness or bring about new ideas to support those students previously engaged in the criminal justice system. Also, it may be important to interview staff and other stakeholders in regards to their perceptions of how to best support this above student population. Stakeholders' perceptions of strategies to support these young people may vary from agency-to-agency or staff-to-staff. In addition, strategies that participants in this study identified as beneficial may significantly differ from those

suggested by other stakeholders. Furthermore, include students with criminal records through interviews or surveys that gives voice to those who have been voiceless in the development of relevant program ideas for this particular student population.

Summary

The school-to-prison pipeline begins years prior to individuals committing their first crime (Wilson, 2014). A variety of experiences occur through out an educational career that continues many young people on the school-to-prison path. Education has the potential to provide additional opportunity to individuals with a criminal history and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. However, for many the negative experiences they have encountered in an educational setting have made it difficult for them to reengage in education. In order to educate these young people it is crucial to have an understanding of previous and current barriers to best support this population. This requires a staff with the knowledge, experience, and skill-set to support these young people as well as providing appropriate supportive services to address a wide range of their needs. Addressing the needs of those with an existing criminal record is a critical step in disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in a Researcher Study

Dear Student,

I am writing to inform you about a dissertation study that is being conducted at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) regarding factors that impact students with a criminal record obtaining their high school diploma. Sonia Hernandez, a doctoral candidate, is conducting the study as part of the Ed.D. degree requirements.

The purpose of Sonia Hernandez's dissertation study is to explore factors that influence students with a criminal record in obtaining their high school diploma. This study will add new knowledge to existing information regarding supporting students in a high school setting with various experiences and needs. Your participation in this study would be to participate in a series of 30 to 60 minute interviews, a focus group and a document review of your transcripts.

Any personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name or school, will not appear in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your time investment in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact Sonia Hernandez at Sonia.Hernandez.8@my.csun.edu or (818) 522-2642. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Best,
Sonia Hernandez

Appendix B
California State University, Northridge

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline:
Factors Influencing Latino Academic Attainment

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Factors Influencing Latino Academic Attainment, a study conducted by Sonia Hernandez as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher: Sonia Hernandez

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
818-522-2643
Sonia.Hernandez.8@my.csun.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. William De La Torre

Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
818-677-2591

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of Sonia Hernandez's dissertation study is to explore factors that influence students with a criminal record in obtaining their high school diploma.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are (1) a Latino male, (2) age 18 to 24, (3) who has experience in the criminal justice system and (4) is currently pursuing their high school diploma.

Exclusion Criteria

You will be excluded from this study if you have current cases, pending cases or restricted movement.

Time Commitment

This study will involve approximately two hours of your time over the course of three months.

PROCEDURES

If you elect to participate in this study, you will be asked to (1) complete a series of two 30 to 60 minute interviews, and (2) allow all your student transcripts to be reviewed. Your transcripts will be reviewed to examine schools you have attended, credits earned, courses completed and gaps in education.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: mild emotional discomfort, embarrassment and boredom. To minimize the risk identified you are free to stop at any time or skip questions. You may be referred to a counselor on site at Antelope Valley YouthBuild to assist with any risks or discomforts that may occur during the study.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits

You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, information from this study may aid in supporting students obtaining their high school diploma in the future.

Benefits to Others of Society

Participants in this study will contribute to a better understanding of supporting Latino males with a criminal record in making gains toward their high school diploma.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study. There is no cost to you for participation in this study. You will not be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses, such as parking or transportation fees.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data

All identifiable data will be stored in a locked drawer in the home of the researcher. Data will be kept for two years from publication of the study and destroyed.

Data Storage

All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected. Any documents that are not electronic will be stored under lock in key in the home of the researcher.

Data Access

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your student records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention

The researchers intend to keep the research data for approximately two years after publication and then it will be destroyed.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge, Antelope Valley YouthBuild or YouthBuild Charter School of California. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study (Please initial those that apply).

- I agree to be audio recorded*
- I do not wish to be audio recorded*
- I agree to grant access to review and print my academic transcripts.*
- I do not agree to grant access to review and print my academic transcripts*
- I agree to receive a transcript of my interviews via e-mail.*
- I do not wish to receive a transcript of my interviews via e-mail.*

Participant Signature _____
Date

Printed Name of Participant

Researcher Signature _____
Date

Printed Name of Researcher

Appendix C

Interview Protocol First Interview-Student

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Hello, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:

As discussed, this is the first interview in a series of interviews in an effort to collect information on what factors impact students with a criminal record obtaining their high school diploma. During this initial interview we will discuss your criminal history.

Timing:

Today's interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions

1. Tell me about your childhood experience. Describe the environment, the location, the people and any other detail you can recall.
 - a. Did you live in more than one location?
 - b. Who did you live with?
 - c. Did you experience any challenges during this time?
2. Tell me about your experience as a teenager. Describe the environment, the location, the people and any other detail you can recall.
 - a. Did you live in more than one location?
 - b. Who did you live with?
 - c. Did you experience any challenges during this time?
3. Describe your first experience with the criminal justice system.
 - a. How old were you when this occurred?
 - b. What were the events leading up to this experience?
 - c. What was the result of this experience?
4. Discuss all of your experiences with the criminal justice system.
 - a. How many times have you been arrested and for what?
 - b. What occurred after each incident (probation, jail, camp etc.)

- c. Why do you think you have had multiple experiences with the criminal justice system?
5. Tell me about some other people you know who have had similar experiences with the criminal justice system.
 - a. Why do you think this is?
 6. In thinking about others like you how does their experience with regard to the criminal justice system compare to yours?
 - a. Why do you think this is?
 - b. What makes this person similar to you?
 7. Tell me about people you know that didn't have experiences with the criminal justice system.
 - a. Why do you think this is?
 8. How would you describe yourself to someone who has never met you?
 - a. What makes you choose these descriptions?
 - b. Of the things you just listed, which are more important to you than others?
 9. What were the reasons behind your criminal activity?
 - a. Were other people involved in the activities?
 10. Tell me about your gang involvement?
 - a. Have you associated with anyone in a gang?
 11. What have been your challenges of having a criminal record?
 - a. Are you currently on probation or parole?
 - b. Have there been consequences to having a criminal record?
 - c. How has having a criminal record impacted your education?
 12. Tell me about your experience with your family during your interaction with the criminal justice system.
 13. Describe your transition after your last interaction with the criminal justice system.
 14. Tell me about how having a criminal record has shaped your goals for the future.
 15. Discuss the possibility of having a future encounter with the criminal justice system.
 16. If you were going to recommend a strategy to support you in not committing another crime what would it be?

Closing Questions

I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn't get a chance to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these interactions with me? If there's anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today's interview session. I appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time? As you know, this is the first of two interview sessions. Before we end the session today, I'd like to take a moment to schedule the second interview (if we have not yet done so). May we do so now?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol Second Interview-Student

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Hello, thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I would like to give you the opportunity to ask any questions.

Purpose of the interview:

As discussed, this is the second interview in a series of two interviews in an effort to collect information on what factors impact students with a criminal record obtaining their high school diploma. During this interview we will discuss your experience in education

Timing:

Today's interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions

1. Tell me about your experience in education prior to attending your current school. Describe the environment, students, staff and any other detail you can recall.
 - a. What resources did you have at this school (counseling, sports etc.)?
 - b. What resources did you use? Why?
 - c. Describe the typical student who used school resources.
2. Describe the typical student at your previous school(s).
3. Describe your typical day at your last school. What memories do you recall from your time there?
 - a. Do you think others at your school had similar experiences? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the length of time you have been pursuing your high school diploma. Describe the reasons behind this time frame.
5. What were the reasons behind leaving the last school you attended?
 - a. Prior to this setting did you have a break in attending school?
6. What made you decide to attend this school?
 - a. How long have you be at this site?

7. Tell me about your experience at your current program. Describe the environment, students, staff and any other detail that stand out.
 - a. What resources do you have at this school
 - b. What resources do you use? Why?
 - c. Describe the typical student who uses these resources.
8. Describe your typical day at your current school. Discuss your experiencing in the classroom and other aspects of the school.
9. How would your teachers describe you? Why?
 - a. How would your peers describe you?
10. Describe the similarities and differences between this school and other schools you have attended.
11. Describe what has been done to support you in achieving your goal to obtain your high school diploma.
 - a. How has this program addressed your needs?
 - b. What needs are not being met?
12. If a friend asked you if they should attend this program, what would be your advice?
 - a. What are some of the reasons why you would or would not recommend this school?
 - b. What type of students benefit from this program?
13. What advise would you give to those attempting to support you with earning your high school diploma?

Closing Questions

I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn't get a chance to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these interactions with me? If there's anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today's interview session. I appreciate your taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifying information will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time? As you know, this is the final interview.