

**THE GATEKEEPING BEHIND MERITOCRACY:
VOICES OF NYC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
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Abstract

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Survey and focus group sampling of students in high achieving schools compared to lower achieving schools were used to examine why there are fewer black men graduating from high schools in New York City as well as high schools around the country compared to other groups of students. Race is disaggregated in order to look at the difference in achievement rates for African American, black Hispanic, African, and Afro-Caribbean men. The findings support the contention that foreign-born blacks do better academically than native blacks.

Focus groups consist of black males, females, and staff at six of the 12 schools; field notes are included for the other five. The research includes 23 faculty members, and 155 participants with quantitative data on 151 student participants, largely black males. Schools were sampled across four typologies: alternative, empowerment, private, and public to compare high achieving and low achieving schools. The findings uncover some of the reasons as to why fewer black males were graduating from high school. Some of the reasons include weak family, school, and community networks, and low skill levels. Successful black males report strong familial and school community networks, positive school culture that encourages learning, and high teacher

expectation. Students report violent schools, teachers who do not make learning relevant, and apathetic teachers and staff hinder learning. The findings intend to inform the development of programs, designed to address the needs of black male students who attend John Jay, other City University of New York colleges, and schools across the country.

Given the interest in growing incarceration rates and penal policy, this research explores proactive measures for dealing with at risk youth, e.g. creating tutoring and mentoring programs, recruiting and retaining more teachers and administrators who represent the student body, providing more funding for NCLB, diverting first time offenders, and expanding breakfast and lunch programs.

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Recognition is extended to the doctoral program at John Jay College, CUNY, and Douglas Thompkins for allowing me to work on this project and Ric Curtis for agreeing to mentor me. I would also like to acknowledge the support received and ideas interchanged from my research partner, Andre Spynda. Lastly, this research is dedicated to black males across the nation and to the people who work with at risk youth. This study is a call to action for policymakers throughout the country.

PREFACE

As a history teacher in a public school district in Westchester County for the past eight years, a woman of color, and social scientist, I wear multiple hats in my approach to accessing and offering practical solutions to the plight of black males in New York City High Schools. In this study, I seek to evaluate what contextual variables attribute to successful versus unsuccessful black males in New York City High Schools. As a black woman first, this topic is very near and dear to my heart. I have witnessed many black males, some family members and some friends become involved in the criminal justice system. I have also encountered racism, as a black, Hispanic woman from various institutional means, e.g. employment, primary and secondary schooling.

I will never forget the time when a young Caucasian boy in Kindergarten called me the “N” word. Due to living in America, where race impacts lived experiences, I had a keen sense of color at such a young age. Thus, I reported the incident to the school’s only African American teacher on recess duty. Her response, although a bit striking but most likely coming from lived experiences, to the young man was: “That’s not nice, apologize. Would you like if she called you a cr**ker?” I faintly remember the young boy saying, “No and sorry.”

I was so hurt by this ordeal. I hurried home once school was finished to tell my mother. She was shocked by the teacher’s reply, but made it a teachable moment by explaining to my young, tender ears- race relations. She tried her best to protect and shield me, but also kept it real by telling me her various experiences. In doing this, she explained that adversity made people stronger and basically told me that one incident was one of many more to come. She taught me to be proud of my heritage and made it her job to teach me positive components of Black History.

I am very fortunate to have had her do this, for many black students may not have this positive role model or experience at such a young age. She didn't. My mother grew up extremely poor; her father was an immigrant from Puerto Rico who left the family and her mother a native of North Carolina grew terminally ill when she was just 14 years old. She dropped out of high school in order to work to support herself for she could no longer endure the teasing for having holes in her shoes and wearing an unkempt jacket-not to mention retiring to bed hungry nightly. Her lived experiences were her reality and my source of what life is like for many impoverished children. I was fortunate that my mother and father provided a better life for my younger sisters and me. My father is also from very humble beginnings. He is an immigrant from Belize in Central America, who shares stories of having no indoor plumbing growing up,

Furthermore, my upbringing prepared me to compete in this world and gave me an understanding of societal relations, which later encouraged me to teach history. As an educator, I see firsthand the lower rates of achievement and higher suspension and special education classification rates of black children, particularly males (Holzman, 2004). Across the nation, people have been concerned with addressing the racial divide and closing the achievement gap where young men of color continually lag behind. Why do black males in general lag behind their white counterparts? On the surface, some have concluded that black students, particularly black males, appear not to take receiving a high school diploma as seriously as their white or black female peers (Ogbu, 2003).

Given the alarming rates of incarceration and high dropout rates, it requires one to delve beneath the surface to examine the causes. Once this is done, it would reveal the many factors at

work. Using sociological explanations, which include legal socialization and social reproduction theories, this research, seeks to build a theoretical framework to assess the contextual variables, e.g. family involvement, peer pressure, role models, socioeconomic status, and race, racism that attribute to a successful or unsuccessful black male student. This leads me to the social scientist approach on this project.

As a social scientist, I will be assessing the plight of young black men by disaggregating race in order to look at the difference in achievement rates for African American, black Hispanic, African, and Afro-Caribbean men. Research supports the contention that foreign-born black men do better academically than native-born blacks (Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2007; Ogbu, 2003). Research has also shown that students learn better from people who look like them (Ferguson, 2002). This I can attest to firsthand.

On numerous occasions, I encounter students receiving disciplinary referrals in the office who while in my class for the most part are respectful and complete my class work. Upon finding out the behavior issues, I talk to the child, express my shock, and distaste for his or her behavior. More importantly, I explain that he or she needs to be respectful to all teachers or people regardless of like or dislike. This does not mean that all black children are respectful towards me and complete their work, but most, including white children, are respectful and see me as a role model, perhaps due to effectiveness in communicating with them and keeping it real, e.g. competent in teaching, impart social capital and knowledge of pop culture (Gibson, 2002). Hence, when behavioral problems appear with black children, the issues are usually on par with their peers.

Many students' patterns of inappropriate behavior and the findings from the focus groups employed in this study will reveal that children respond to being mentored by people who are effective communicators, treat them with respect and look like them (Ferguson, 2002, 2001; Noguera, 2003). More teachers and faculty of color, increased expectations from faculty, such as teachers and guidance counselors are what children of color need more.

Further, in this study I will include implications for policy makers by offering practical solutions to closing the achievement gap. This project will also add to the literature, by surveying, interviewing, listening to the students who are most at risk, and lastly suggesting measures to increase the worth of the prize, a high school diploma and college degree to the nation's most at risk population.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	
I. Introduction: Why a Black Male Initiative?.....	1
1. Theoretical Framework.....	7
2. Cultural capital and educational success.....	8
3. Institutions perpetuate inequalities.....	9
4. Social capital and educational achievement.....	14
5. Notion of resistance in educational settings.....	16
6. Social reproduction theory and race.....	17
7. Intersection of class and race and social reproduction.....	18
8. Legal reasoning, social factors, and delinquency.....	20
9. Black males' attitudes about the law.....	24
10. Tying it all together.....	27
II. What the Literature says about Black Males in Education.....	29
1. State of black males in education.....	29
2. Impact of race relations on education.....	36
3. Recidivism and its correlation with high school drop out rates.....	43
4. Over-involvement in the criminal justice system.....	43
5. Recent advances being made to improve the performance of black males in NYC.....	46
6. Tying it all together.....	53
7. Hypotheses.....	54
8. Strong schools.....	56
9. Strong families.....	57
III. Data & Methodology.....	60
1. Introduction.....	60
2. Data Analysis	62
3. Observing the educational scene from a variety of perspectives.....	64
4. Research design.....	65
5. Participant observation.....	68
6. Qualitative interviews.....	72

7. Sources of participants and selection criteria.....	73
8. Procedures.....	74
9. Potential harm or benefit.....	75
10. Confidentiality.....	75
11. Tying it all together.....	76
IV. Voices of Black Males in the School Environment.....	78
School culture / attitude (teacher expectation).....	79
1. Positive school culture: High achieving school.....	83
2. Institutionalization of NYC schools.....	83
3. Appearance.....	86
4. School culture (from students).....	87, 110
5. School culture (from educators).....	92
6. Teacher expectation.....	112
7. Teacher involvement: Apathetic teachers vs. empowering teachers.....	114
8. Teacher involvement: Public vs. private.....	116
9. Public vs. Private school environment.....	116
10. Negative peer influences.....	117
Alternative lifestyle once leave school.....	118
Socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity.....	122
1. Sex differentials in the value of education.....	125
Motivational forces: Peer & parental influences.....	126
1. Positive role models / Parental involvement	127
2. Defining success.....	132
3. Positive role models / peers.....	140
Barriers to educational success: Lack of parental involvement.....	141
Historical circumstances speak to issues of involuntary vs. involuntary Immigration, cultural differences and demographic differences.....	142
School community's involvement	144
Community valuing education.....	144
Black males' perceptions of education & success.....	149
Presence of gangs in schools.....	153
Opinions on code switching.....	155
Stereotypical thoughts on black males.....	156

Instant gratification	157
Impact race plays in schools / colorism.....	159
Preparation / Skill levels.....	161
Notion of last chance.....	163
Media’s influence on the community.....	164
Tying it all together.....	165
Interview with field researcher regarding school culture, community, teacher expectations, and family life.....	167
Tying it all together	173
Do focus group findings support the hypotheses?.....	174
Tying it all together.....	184
V. Discussion.....	186
Limitations of the Research.....	192
VI. Policy Suggestions.....	196
Policy on No Child Left Behind.....	196
Policy on education.....	197
Policy on incarceration.....	200
Bibliography.....	231

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 List of Schools	p. 66
TABLE 2 Types of Data	p. 67
TABLE 3 Grade Point Average Conversion & Number of Students	p. 134
TABLE 4 Graduation Rates	p. 135
TABLE 5 High School GPA & Highest Education Degree Obtained by Mother.....	p. 137
TABLE 6 High School Attended & Ethnic Background.....	p. 139
TABLE 7 High School GPA & Highest Education Degree Obtained by Father & Ethnic Origin	p. 140
TABLE 8 High School GPA & Highest Education Degree Obtained by Mother & Ethnic Origin	p. 140

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: United States Population By Race	p. 86
Figure 2: State and Fed Inmates By Race.....	p. 86

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BMI= Black Male Initiative
CFI= Comparative Fit Index
NFI= Normed Fit Index
RMSEA= Root Mean Standard Error of Approximation
SF= Strong family
WF= Weak family
SS= Strong school
WS= Weak school
SES= Socioeconomic status
GPA= Grade Point Average
NYC DOE= New York City Department of Education
P.S. = Public School (Pre-K-8th)
J.H.S. = Junior High School
HA= High Achievers
NCES= National Center of Education Statistics

Court Cases:

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

Parents Involved in the Community Schools v. Seattle School District, No. 1 (05-908 & 05-915), (2007)

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION: WHY A BLACK MALE INITIATIVE?

Initiatives aiming to investigate why black males are underrepresented in higher education and the workforce while overrepresented in the penal system have been launched across the country, e.g. Baltimore, Maryland and the Black Male Initiative (BMI) at CUNY in New York City (BMI Task Force, 2005; Pipeline Crisis, Education Working Group, 2007). CUNY's BMI receives annual funding of approximately two million from the City Council that aids different schools within the CUNY system to advise, recruit, and retain black males. For example, the BMI program officials and New York City College of Technology University's recruitment officers work together use College Now, a program that identifies potential local high school students interested in the STEM disciplines, of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, to increase enrollment of black male students. The same concept is followed at the other CUNY schools, where BMI officials at John Jay College work together with College Now to identify potential students interested in criminal justice.

City College's BMI was recently named one of nine U.S. Model Replication Institutions by NASA and the National Science Foundation for its attempt to retain black male students (Forde, 2007). The recognition results from the program's structure of tutoring and advising (Forde, 2007). The founding president of the Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP), James Merisotis, hails the program for its unique approach to helping a historically underrepresented group of students and encourages the program's replication nationwide (Forde, 2007).

Unfortunately, not everyone shares the same sentiments. Currently, CUNY's BMI is under federal investigation for anti-discrimination. The federal Department of Education launched an

investigation of the program at 16 campuses early in 2008 to assess whether the BMI programs violate federal laws that prohibit race and gender discrimination (Goldstein, 2008). Michael Meyers, a black male and the director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition, filed the complaint against CUNY in 2006 claiming such programs stigmatize and segregate black men. Many including myself disagree with such assertions because the BMI program was born to address the plight of black males in the city. Programs aimed to assist black male students intend to address their under representation in higher education are not discriminatory according to President Bush's No Child Left Behind, although other problems exist with the act, e.g. increased reliance on testing, lack of funding to impoverished schools which maintain the status quo. Additionally, Michael Arena, a CUNY spokesperson asserts the BMI program is available to all who are academically eligible (Goldstein, 2008). Likewise, Charles Barron, the chairman of the council's Committee for Higher Education maintains the investigation is "a waste of taxpayer money" and other programs such as women's or Asian studies receive ethnic or gender specific funding (cited in Goldstein, 2008). The BMI continues pending the results of the investigation.

Given the plight of black males nationwide, programs aimed to bridge the achievement gap between black males and other groups of students, should continue. It is imperative that researchers and policy experts focus on this at risk population. The body of literature that currently exists focuses primarily on the underachievement of African American youth and males compared to other groups of students. The literature review is inconsistent in its findings and does not specify what contextual variables are most important for black youth and more specifically black males. The gap in the literature exists in part because researchers have focused on quantitative methods to collect critical information about black males in education, employment, and the penal system. To

address these issues, the proposed research, which is a part of the larger CUNY Black Male Initiative, seeks to:

1. Explore what variables are needed for black men to achieve academic success by using qualitative data collections methods with participants in New York City High Schools using survey and focus group sampling of students in high achieving schools compared to lower achieving schools (see Tables 1 & 2 pgs. 67-68),
2. Examine why there are fewer black men graduating from New York City High schools as well as high schools around the country compared to other groups of students,
3. Analyze why incarceration rates for black males continue to rise in New York City and around the country,
4. Provide policy suggestions to increase educational outcomes for black male students in high school, which could simultaneously lower recidivism and first time offending.

To accomplish these goals, this research combines several approaches to data collection and analysis. There will be two forms to the high school data: focus groups from males and females, together and separately, and faculty and staff as well as participant observation, e.g. field notes. In many instances, quantitative data collection, e.g. social demography information, follow the qualitative design and thus is used to substantiate findings. Black students, primarily male, attending different types of high schools in New York City were selected for focus group interviews. The research team sampled 12 schools in the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn and Staten Island, gathered field notes, conducted focus groups as well as informal discussions with students, faculty and administration at the schools. Demographics of the school and focus group were recorded. The focus group populations at the schools consisted of black male students, black female students, staff, faculty, and administrators. The types of schools included:

1. Alternative: “any public or private school having a special curriculum, especially an elementary or secondary school offering a more flexible program of study than a traditional school” (American Heritage, Dictionary of the English Language, 2000),

2. Empowerment: The Empowerment Support Organization (ESO) was first conceived in 2004 as the autonomy zone pilot program, and ESO has expanded every year to include 332 schools in the 2006-2007 school year. ESO provides support to networks of self-affiliated schools. Each network receives support from a team of instructional and business staff members selected by the schools. The Empowerment Schools enjoy great flexibility and autonomy surrounding their own budget, instruction, professional development, and assessment (New York City Department of Education, 2007),
3. Private: “a school founded, conducted, and maintained by a private group rather than by the government, usually charging tuition and often following a particular philosophy, viewpoint, etc.” (American Heritage, Dictionary of the English Language, 2000),
4. Public: in the United States, “a school that is maintained at public expense for the education of the children of a community or district and that constitutes a part of a system of free public education commonly including primary and secondary schools” (American Heritage, Dictionary of the English Language, 2000).

This study sought to compare high achieving schools to low achieving schools. A broad spectrum of schools across the four typologies listed above were chosen from the very best, the one with high graduation rates, attendance rates and the most empowerment, to the very worst, where there is constant disarray between students, teachers, faculty, and administrators. The school in between is one that is not doing too poorly, e.g. graduation and attendance rates are in between the high and low achieving schools, but could improve. Some of the empowerment, alternative, and public schools included in this study are also career academy schools, which focus on personalized learning and include academic and professional curricula.

At least two of each typology were selected to allow for an in depth comparison. The schools selected constituted a purposeful sample chosen based on graduation, attendance rates, number of extracurricular activities, honors and advanced placement courses, community support/funding, and resources, e.g. expenditures per pupil. By sampling the four types of schools, this study sought to provide insight into what programs could be developed to increase high school graduation rates, the attendance of black males in higher institutions such as CUNY and John Jay

College and lower chances for criminal offending. The focus of the study is on family, school community, the larger community, location of the school and community where students reside, since many New York City students do not attend schools located in their community. Some themes that will be explored are: positive role models, attitudes toward school and perceptions of education, peer pressure, communal involvement or lack thereof, reasons students leave school, engagement in negative or risky behavior, teacher expectations, parental support, racism, sex differentials: socially constructed ideas of femininity and masculinity, culture of school, e.g. metal detectors, violent or nonviolent (see appendix 7).

The research focused on high achieving black males' attitudes and perceptions toward education compared to lower achieving black males. Students were asked questions to get their perceptions of education (see appendix 1). Given the predictive role education plays in overall success, it is imperative that initiatives aimed at this at-risk group be implemented (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2007; Eaton & McArdle, 2007; Washington Based Ed Trust, 2007; Kozol, 2005). Other issues the research will address consider the school atmosphere and support the notion that strong schools, e.g. adequate per pupil spending, rigorous course access, produce successful students (see pgs. 57-59 & appendices 1, 2, & 3).

Research by Harper and Maton, Hrabowski and Greif, defines a successful black male both on the college and high school level as one: with a grade point average of at least 3.0 or above, involved in student activities and leadership roles, with numerous scholarships for achievement, who has developed meaningful public relations with faculty outside of the classroom and has participated in enriching educational experiences, e.g. internships, study abroad, summer programs (Maton, Hrabowski & Greif 1998, Harper, 2005). For this study a 2.5 GPA, a B-, or above is used along with other criteria to measure success. Although some, including myself would frown on a

2.5 GPA as a measure, it was agreed upon between the researchers on this project and confirmed by Princeton Review that a 2.5 equates to a B-. Because GPA is an imperfect tool, other variables, e.g. student activities, leadership, employment, are included in this study.

Paramount to increasing college attendance, this research gathers data from the at risk population themselves to better understand their needs, raise graduation rates, and lower recidivism. This study recognizes the connection between high drop out rates and criminal offending and seeks to address them. This analysis contends that proactive measures to combat recidivism, reduce criminal involvement, and increase access to adequate employment are necessary to improve educational goals for black male students. Research shows there is a correlation between high school drop out rates and criminal offending (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Drug Policy Alliance, 2007; Eaton & McArdle, 2007; Western & Petit, 2004; Western, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2003). Therefore, in order to implement effective educational interventions, the detrimental effects of the penal system must be recognized, acknowledged and understood.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) shows high school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to get arrested than high school graduates in their lifetime. One point four billion dollars in incarceration rates per year could be saved with an increase of just 1% in the high school graduation rate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Incarceration does not have to be inevitable. Research illustrates children of colors' chances for being incarcerated are increased by structural ills that pervade schools and the penal system due to the failure of the two systems to work together (Eaton & McArdle, 2007). The Institute for Race & Justice recognizes that ineffective policies can be replaced with interventions and programs that aim to keep at risk students in school and help those who have dropped out and or entered the penal system

successfully re-enter society (Eaton & McArdle, 2007). By conducting an analysis of conditions that plague inner city schools, this research seeks to identify and suggest policies that will keep at risk children in school and out of the criminal justice system.

Theoretical framework:

Several different theories have been proposed to attempt to investigate the variables that contribute to black males' success in school as well as the wider community e.g. decrease in criminal activity. Social reproduction theory guides this research but in more race-focused terms. Before reviewing the importance of race, social reproduction theory is first examined.

Two important terms to understanding social reproduction is as follows: agency-an individual's ability to act or choose and structure- the social system or the social hierarchy determines people's actions. Reproductionists contend that social institutions such as schools serve the interest of the upper class because schools act as mechanisms to reproduce social inequalities. Social reproduction theorists criticize the achievement ideology as a dominating myth that hides the truth behind class immobility (MacLeod, 1995; Allen, 2001). Social reproductionists primarily contend that the working class is adversely affected by the myth of meritocracy regardless of race.

According to this myth, anyone who works hard, receives an education and adapts the behavioral norms of society will succeed. This same premise underlies much of American life. However, the system is not purely just, there are linguistic, cultural and political modalities that ensure inequality. Hence, when the working class attempts to climb the social ladder and fail, they blame themselves not the system (MacLeod, 1995; Allen, 2001). Social reproductionists who use Marxist theories maintain that the same vehicles for social mobility such as schools actually serve to reproduce existing class inequalities (MacLeod, 1995.). Other scholars contend culture

(Bourdieu, 1977), language (Bernstein, 1975; Heath, 1983) and political resistance (Willis, 1977) perpetuate inequalities.

Cultural capital and educational success:

According to Bourdieu (1973), a social reproductionist, success in the educational system is largely dependent on the extent in which individuals have absorbed the dominant culture or how much cultural capital is held. Cultural capital is the general cultural background, knowledge, and skills that pass on through generations. Paul DiMaggio (1982) links cultural capital to school success. The four main points of cultural capital and school success are as follows:

1. Distinctive cultural capital is transmitted by each social class,
2. Schools reward the cultural capital of the dominant classes and systematically devalue the cultural capital of the lower classes,
3. Differential academic achievement is linked to economic success,
4. Schools legitimate the former by the myth of meritocracy (cited in Brand, 2007).

For Bourdieu (1984), cultural and linguistic capital each has its own cultural background, knowledge, dispositions, and tastes that are transmitted through the family described as *habitus* (cited in Brand, 2007). The *habitus* allows for deep routinization, naturalness, and embedding within a person's body and language. Schools incorporate the cultural and linguistic capital of the dominant group and teach the knowledge and skills that are most highly valued. This occurs in the form of tracking, where middle class and upper class students are tracked in creative, advanced placement and honors courses, while lower class students are tracked in remedial courses.

To possess cultural capital means one is considered educated or talented. In other words, schools look like they are neutral in evaluating students, but because the knowledge and dispositions of the middle class correspond to the *habitus* and cultural capital of the dominant

group; students from that class perform better in schools (cited in Brand, 2007). Schools require cultural resources with which only some students are endowed.

Institutions perpetuate inequalities:

Bowles and Gintis (1976) maintain that schools are training young people for their future economic and occupational position according to their current social class position, where students of working-class origin are trained to take orders, to be obedient, and are subject to more discipline. Contrarily students of professionals are trained using more progressive methods, which give them internal discipline and self-presentation skills. According to Marxist explanations, the structure of the economy takes precedence over human action or agency. The economy requires people to take on different work roles and thus sets of skills, knowledge, and dispositions. Additionally, this theory purports the economy requires a reserve labor force, both skilled and unskilled, to keep wages low and to increase profit for the capitalists.

Other Marxist approaches view determinism, structure, and material as significant in understanding class reproduction. The deterministic view claims people have no choice because their futures are determined for them by the economic structure and their position within it. The structural view contends the economic structure will end up reproducing itself, whatever people do, and the materialists maintain a focus on material/economic conditions (cited in Brand, 2007); the economic and occupational structure is paramount in this research along with concept of agency, where individuals have the option to choose their economic positions.

Whether one comes from poverty, middle classdom or wealth dramatically impacts their lives. If an individual comes from middle-class and upper class homes, then he attends schools that are better funded and equipped with certified teachers. Chances are these students' parents are

more involved in their child's life academically and have the time to be. An exception would be some middle class black parents, i.e. Ogbu's (2003) study in Ohio, where he reports the parents thought the schools knew best, perhaps due to cultural differences where many people of color believe the schools know best and have their child's best interest. The former is not always the case. Parents need to be more involved. Regrettably, many parents from lower socioeconomic status have to focus on survival, place of residence and nourishment, which detracts from their ability to be more involved in their child's academic career. The former finding is reported in this study, where students revealed violence in their neighborhoods and parents who worked long hours.

Contrary to Marxist explanations, which take into account structural ills people face, functionalists such as Talcott Parsons, contend that societies need a means to motivate top tier workers to fill important and difficult positions. Stratification allows the most skilled individuals to fill the functionally important roles. For functionalists, inequality is a rational and efficient consequence of consensus societies (cited in Brand, 2007). Davis and Moore maintain that special skills and talent is scarce, where training for functionally important employment such as medical doctors is costly, thus a system of rewards naturally select and reward the right people for the position (cited in Brand, 2007). Functionalists further maintain that there is a connection between innate abilities, e.g. intelligence and strength, and level of employment and income. Similarly, Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize and distinguished economist and philosopher, explores the concept of function in his book *Inequality Reexamined*, (1992). According to Sen (1992), "Capabilities is, thus, a set of vectors of functioning, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another" (p. 40). Sen's views are shared by others including prominent African Americans.

Black conservatives, such as Clarence Thomas and Shelby Steele, support the notions of self-reliance and rugged individualism as means to success. Both Thomas and Steele critique black culture and values as barriers to black achievement and focus primarily on meritocracy, although they may have to revisit their notion of meritocracy considering President Bush's admission to being a C student (Tate & Randolph, 2002). Their critique is very problematic considering their heavy reliance on the conservative party for funding, media exposure and research monies. Conservatives receive funding from major conservative organizations and think tanks e.g.: John M. Olin Foundation, Smith Richardson Foundation, Sarah Mellon Scaife Foundation, Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Manhattan Institute, Hoover Institute, Cato Institute etc. Before the 1980s, many black conservatives had no sponsoring clients and made claims against civil rights hoping to attract clients, e.g. George Schuyler.

In 1980, President Reagan set up and financed the Fairmont Conference as a conservative institute where "the objectives of the conference were clear: to establish a cadre of blacks of some prominence who could speak to a new thrust in domestic politics in regard to black Americans, with the hope and anticipation that they would emerge as alternative leaders to the civil rights leadership group" (Walton Jr., 2002, p. 149). Hence, this conference pulled together black leaders who were struggling for sponsorship, legitimated them and gave them national exposure and access to resources: a complete contradiction to their individual rhetoric. After this conference, black conservatives received top government positions, e.g. Samuel Pierce: Housing and Urban Development, Clarence Thomas: head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and now Supreme Court Justice, and Clarence Pendleton: chairman of the Civil Rights Commission. Others received federal and judiciary appointments and some sub-cabinet positions (Walton Jr.,

2002). Individuals such as Thomas Sowell, Glenn Loury, Walter Williams, and Robert Woodson obtained positions at conservative think tanks and foundations, others in academia.

Their individualist approach ignores the effects of class inheritance, e.g. individuals born into wealth or poverty significantly affecting life chances. An overemphasis on consensus ignores conflict and the intersection of class and race, which perpetuate inequality in the United States. Today sociologists and historians understand race as a social construct and how this illusion that defines physical characteristics in particular groups created an inferior group for all non-whites. Those characterized as white benefit extensively from racial classifications and laws that were created affecting life chances and opportunities based upon the physical differences that include hair texture, facial features, and color.

Further, the do-it-yourself-doctrine posited by individuals such as Thomas and recent comments by Bill Cosby, which blames the victims, black Americans for their lot in life completely, undermines the years of institutional racism that created the wealth gap of today. Significant racial gaps in most domains of life exist between whites and blacks where the races are highly polarized about what to do. The role of government is one of the most contested issues (Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). Blacks generally support liberal views on the role of government where whites remain divided on such views (Sears, et. al, 2000).

Although it has been noted that blacks have made considerable progress since the 1950s and 1960s, there is still much work to be done. The number of blacks earning at least twice the poverty-line levels has grown from one percent in 1940 to nearly 50% by the 1970s, but as Sears, et. al, (2000) note progress has slowed considerably so much so that it hasn't changed since the 1970s. Additionally, the black middle class continues to lag behind their white counterparts with fewer resources. For instance, black households earned close to 60% as much as the average white

household did in 1988, but had only 8% as much net worth. Blacks are also only 65% as likely as whites to own their homes (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995). For example, blacks generally do not receive down payments from their parents to buy their first homes, which results in much higher mortgages and amount borrowed for blacks. Thus, even if both blacks and whites make the same income annually, the amount of resources and assets differ substantially, usually resulting in more debt and less available liquid cash for blacks. According to Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, “An accurate and realistic appraisal of the economic footing of the black middle class reveals its precariousness, marginality, and fragility” (1995, p. 93).

When individuals such as Shelby Steele, Michael Meyers, who filed anti-discriminatory charges against the BMI, and Clarence Thomas publicly, denounce governmental assistance, their anti-liberal stance adversely affects minorities: blacks and women. Their public stance ignores the fact that many black conservatives have benefited from affirmative action. For example, Ward Connerly, a member of the University of California Board of Regents, received millions from the state’s Department of Energy’s weatherization program as a minority business owner (Tate & Randolph, 2002). Additionally, Clarence Thomas shuns practices such as affirmative action and is arguably a recipient just like Connerly.

This being said, functionalists who begin their explanation from a consensus standpoint, miss a large depth of history when explaining inequality and agency. According to persons such as Parsons, individuals have options, and those with superior intellectual ability, strength, and motivation succeed. But this explanation is too simple especially when reviewing the history of the United States. For instance, if a child born into wealth and one born into poverty work equally hard at school, the one with wealth has an advantage because his parents can pay for luxury training and expose their child to leisure activities that the latter cannot. This beginning does not allow for true

meritocracy. Additionally, students from under privileged beginnings may lose faith in the system that is supposed to reward their efforts. For this reason, agency alone cannot account for success, there must be weight placed on the socio-economic structure of society.

Social capital and educational achievement:

Coleman (1988) describes social capital in the creation of human capital by using two broad intellectual streams in the explanation of social action. One of the streams used by most sociologists sees the actor as socialized and action as governed by rules, norms, and obligations. The other stream characterizes the work of most economists and sees the actor as arriving at goals independently and having a principle of action. In an attempt to modify both streams, Coleman illustrates the social structural conditions under which social capital arises and uses it to examine high school drop out rates. He criticizes the sociological stream because this stream portrays the actor as having no engine in action. The concept of action is wholly a product of the environment. Contrarily, the economic stream negates the fact that persons' actions are shaped by social context, norms and social organization. Coleman (1988) explains that social relations and social structures facilitate social capital where actors establish purposeful relationships and continue them as benefits continue.

In his study, Coleman (1988) introduces social capital into social theory by paralleling the concepts of financial capital, physical and human capital. He uses the High School and Beyond data set in 1986, which includes 893 public schools, 84 catholic schools, and 27 other private schools. The analysis uses logistic regression with a random sample of 4,000 students. The variables included are socioeconomic status, race, Hispanic ethnicity, number of siblings, number of moves since fifth grade, whether mother worked when child was young, mother's expectation of child's educational attainment, frequency of discussions with parents about personal matters, and

presence of both parents in the house. Coleman finds students with more siblings received less attention and thus produce weaker educational outcomes. He reports the high school drop out rate is higher for students from single families (13.1% drop out rate for two parents and 19.1 for single parents) and for those who have moved more than once. The drop out rate is 11.8% if the family has not moved, 16.7% if the family moved once, and 23.1% if the family moved twice. The drop out rates between sophomore and senior year are 14.4% in public schools, 11.9% in private schools, and a low 3.4% in catholic schools.

Coleman finds frequent attendance of religious services in catholic school is a measure of social capital through intergenerational closure. Attendance at religious services were strongly related to social capital, with 19.5% of students who rarely or never attended service dropping out of school compared to 9.1% who did attend. He finds the same result for the eight private schools that have religious affiliations with over 50% of the students of that religion. Their drop out rate was 3.7%. Coleman also purports that a lack of social capital in the family for students who attended catholic schools made little difference and that social capital in the community compensated for any absence in the family. He concludes both social capital in the family, that is parents have high expectations for their children, primarily the mother expects child will go to college and takes time to read and assist with homework, and social capital in the community help create human capital for the next generation. With three sources of family social capital, one sibling, two parents, and mother's expectation of college while controlling for other resources, the drop out rate is 8.1%. Contrarily a family with four siblings, one parent and no expectation from the mother for college, the rate is 30.6%. Still yet, Coleman acknowledges the less than satisfactorily results of the latter because his research did not explicitly examine the effects of social capital in the family.

Coleman (1988) reports both social capital in the family and social capital in the adult community surrounding the school shows evidence in reducing the probability of dropping out of high school. His theory is a great attempt to infuse both intellectual streams and accurately depicts the powerful effects of social capital; however his research does not directly discuss what variables are necessary to produce successful black males. He includes race as a variable but does not discuss its significance or lack thereof.

Race is not an important factor in his research. Given the salience of race in American society and the plight of black males across the nation, research should be aimed at this at risk group. Coleman has also received criticism for his conservative views, which places strong emphasis on the primordial role of the traditional family and religious affiliation as strong indicators of social capital (Portes, 1998). Another downfall to social capital is the exclusion of outsiders from resources by elite social networks, e.g. employment opportunities that tend to be word of mouth. Additionally, successful members can restrict individuality and impose downward levels of norms, which exclude historically oppressed people, such as blacks, from participating fully in society (Portes, 1988). Still yet, his theory is useful in this research because it shows the importance of social capital in a child's life. It is well acknowledge that many children do not come from wealthy beginnings, thus strong schools, those with high attendance and graduation rates, can adequately prepare our nation's black males for academic and future success.

Notion of resistance in educational settings:

Another explanation of social reproduction is the notion of resistance. Student resistance to school is a political response to oppression and limited life chances. This theory relies on the notion of students not believing a high school diploma is going to help them do well. Hence this

theory highlights agency where people are able to act, interpret, and have some power in their lives in response to structures.

In an ethnographic study of white, working class males in a British secondary school, Paul Willis (1977) describes the notion of resistance. Unlike Bowles and Gintis (1976), Willis, contends these young men choose to resist the capitalist structure. He compares those who aspire to middle-class life to the counter-culture of another group of boys who reject the school's achievement ideology and finds some profound insight from the counter-culture. In Willis's (1977) study, the earoles (conformists) and lads (non-conformists) were all working-class.

Willis's account clearly shows how working class and poor students who rebel against school authority were actually being conditioned for blue-collar employment. His influential study, *Learning to Labor* (1977), is an investigation of the development of Marxist ideology of dialectics in a cultural setting (Hadberg, 2006). His study shows the importance of machismo, where education is associated with feminine qualities. Factory work became a place of masculinity, respect, and pay. For the lads factory work is initially a positive experience, yet several years later, the lads felt locked into factory work and into the blue-collar life. Ironically, through their resistance to school and the dominant culture of the middle class, the lads chose their class position and reproduced the social structure. The idea of school work as feminine has been found in other research, see Leicht, Thompkins, Wildhagen, Rogalin, Soboroff, Kelley, Long, & Lovaglia, 2007.

Social reproduction theory and race:

Building on Paul Willis's research, Jay MacCleod's, *"Ain't No Making It,"* attempts to add race to social reproduction theory. His research examines two groups of males living in housing projects, one primarily white, and the other black. MacCleod (1995) finds racial constructs were constitutive in both their experiences in the job market (Allen, 2001). The mostly white males, the

Hallway Hangers, were very critical of the achievement ideology having seen many of their family members attempt middle-classdom and fail, but they still aspired for middle class status. For instance, the Hallway Hangers would acknowledge being street smart but simultaneously put themselves down for being lazy in school or not smart. Additionally, the Hallway Hangers blamed blacks, affirmative action, for reverse racism. The Hallway Hangers claimed jobs that were rightfully theirs were given to special groups even though blacks were not part of the upper echelon. The myth behind the Hallway Hangers' beliefs of affirmative action programs as racially based neglects the fact that women are the primary beneficiaries of affirmative action (Halford, 1999).

The other group MacCleod studies is the Brothers. Even though the Brothers were tracked in lower classes in schools, they wrongly thought they would achieve middle class status. According to MacCleod, this group, mostly black males, blamed themselves for not achieving because as others pointed out, they were receiving special treatment, affirmative action. The meritocratic myth held by the Brothers left them struggling with the structural racism received in schools and employment. Although MacCleod examines race, his research and possibilities for social change are limited because they are based on the term achievement and not achieving membership into a racial group (Allen, 2001). Race just like social class is not a biological inheritance. They are both socially constructed.

Intersection of class and race and social reproduction:

Furthermore, MacCleod's analysis does not address the intersection that exists between class and race. He does not ask the Brothers direct questions about what it means to be black in America nor does he explore how conformist the Hallway Hangers are to the achievement ideology which places achieving whiteness at the forefront (Allen, 2001). Middle class white

supremacy makes whites like the Hangers an alibi. Middle class whites continue to benefit from white privilege as long as working class whites remain the obvious racists (Allen, 2001). Hence, the Hangers remain clueless about the race-based achievement ideology and achieving whiteness, although they are quite critical of the class based achievement ideology. As far as the ignorance of the Brothers, it remains unknown because this is the not focus of MacCleod's analysis (Allen, 2001).

MacCleod also fails to recognize the importance of history and race in his analysis. The founding of the United States was a place of opportunity for Europeans who were willing to become white. According to Allen (2001), the Hangers did experience a typical American story about poor whites who do not do well financially. Usually poor whites harbor self-hate about their socioeconomic status because they have few ways to rationalize their lack of success as whites. Therefore, racialized failure follows with racialized outcomes, which appear to be to an obstacle to their success, their whiteness (Allen, 2001; Lipistiz, 1998; Roediger, 1999). Race does not fill a class-based void as MacCleod suggests, rather the racism held by the Hangers is consistent with their position in society (Allen, 2001). The Brothers, on the other hand, encounter a much more typical American story. As black Americans, the Brothers encountered enduring discrimination resulting in limited acculturation and no real assimilation.

Further, social reproduction theorists like MacCleod emphasize that family background and SES can significantly impact the educational attainment of children. A similar argument could be made for race. Because race is socially constructed, the achievement ideology cannot be viewed in only class-based terms. Given the disproportionate number of black males who lag behind white males, regardless of class, the intersection of class and race must be recognized.

Although Marxist scholars have attempted to add race to the field later on, white Marxists claim that attention to race hinders class unity and diminishes the significance of class (Allen, 2001). By beginning their analysis on achieving middle classdom, white Marxists miss a depth of knowledge on the larger force of working class whites achieving whiteness (Allen, 2001). Allen (2001) contends the achievement ideology can no longer be viewed in terms of middle class achievements but instead should incorporate race as a salient factor. This research recognizes the importance of race and class on educational attainment and attitudes regarding education.

Legal reasoning, social factors, and delinquency:

In addition to social inequalities produced in schools, this study is concerned with the disproportionate amount of black males involved in the penal system. Using the theory of legal socialization, this study will investigate how black males' attitudes and thoughts about law can affect law-abiding behaviors in various ways. One implication of legal socialization theory includes legal knowledge and proposes that increased knowledge of the law reduces the likelihood of the law being violated inadvertently. The second implication is increased knowledge of the law effects the way one behaves toward the law stemming from the way one reasons about the law. Lastly, increased knowledge of the law raises awareness of the consequences of law violation and thus through deterrence produces law-abiding behavior (Jones-Brown, 1997).

Contrary to most other theories on deviant behavior, legal socialization recognizes that the relationship between the individual and the legal system is reciprocal (Jones-Brown, 1997). Hence, law and its enforcement affect values and attitudes just as attitudes and values affect law. Jones-Brown (1997) points out, the acknowledgment of reciprocity implies that "there may be a limit to the level of compliance that may be exacted by deterrence alone, in the absence of other obligatory

feelings toward law” (p. 2). Voluntary compliance refers to the just enforcement of laws, the legitimacy of laws, and role of authority (Grant, 2004).

In an unprecedented study using legal socialization theory, Grant (2004) using a purposeful sample size of over 10,000 Mexican students examined the link between legal reasoning and social factors that could influence conforming behavior and how it can impact self reported delinquency. The study used survey data from 10,000 youths in ninth grade prior to their participation in the Culture of Lawfulness (COL) Program. There were four major components of the COL Program: individual, society, problem solving skills, and social control in relation to organized crime.

For the evaluation, 97 questions with 11 subscales were used; attitudes toward school, personal safety, fatalism, social responsibility, locus of control, self-esteem, obligation to obey the law, support for the police, legal reasoning, self-reported delinquency, and peer associations. The instrument also included 19 substantive knowledge questions related to the curriculum to assess changes in students’ knowledge as the program progressed. The design of the study seeks to evaluate the causal relationship between legal reasoning and delinquency and to see if the program in existence is beneficial.

In his study, Grant (2004) integrates legal socialization and resiliency literature as a new conceptual model where an individual’s likelihood to self-report delinquency is mediated by the way he cognitively sees the importance of laws. The study evaluated a causal relationship between community risk factors, the resiliency factor of legal reasoning, obligation to abide by the law, non-conforming behavior, and perception of law enforcement officials. Legal reasoning occurred in three ascending levels that were based on an individual obeying the law because of fear of punishment, complying because of societal norms, and using ethics and morals in legal decision-making (Tapp & Kohlberg, 1977).

Grant (2004) finds partial support for the mediation model. In other words, ten of the variables selected from the pre-test, each had their own direct effect on delinquency and route to legal reasoning. The variables with the strongest effect on legal reasoning were school attachment and positive peer influences, while support for the police inhibited legal reasoning and increased delinquency (Grant, 2004). The scores for legal reasoning were rated on three levels and averaged 1-3 to show a general picture. The aggregate did not show subtle individual cases (e.g., there may have been some sub grouping that the average data glossed over, such as changes for boys). The poor academic achievers had more of a change than other groups, which contradicted most research relating good legal reasoning to high cognitive abilities.

Although the study used a relatively large sample of over 10,000 making every finding significant and attrition was small, the study was a sample of convenience, which does not make the findings generalizable. There was no comparison group, which weakened the findings. Students could have been bias in self-reporting. Participants could exaggerate the truth or withhold information because they knew that they were being studied, e.g. Hawthorne theory. The researcher also needed to purport the magnitude of the said changes. How much did legal reasoning have to change in order to be significant?

Grant listed five main factors: school, peer, family, individual and community, but noted other variables were not included such as pregnancy complications, poor family management, delinquent peers and an illegitimate formal legal context. It would be important to examine how an illegitimate formal legal context is formulated considering the research seeks to understand legal reasoning. Reliability is increased by using the same scale that was used during the pilot evaluation to measure students' conceptions of rules, laws, rights, and responsibilities (Godson & Kenney, 2000).

Grant tests the conceptual model using Analysis of Moment of Structures (Amos). By using Amos, Grant is able to specify, estimate, assess, and present his model using an intuitive path diagram to show hypothesized relationships among the different variables. Because the full mediation model only fit satisfactorily, with the alternate fit indices not being much better, a Comparative Index Fit (CFI) of .86, a Normed Index Fit (NFI) of .85, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of .032 and confidence intervals equaling .031 to .032, the researcher revised the baseline model to study the effect of each variable on delinquency one at a time. The second model included the endogenous variables, legal reasoning, obligation, social responsibility, and delinquency to purport a direct relationship between legal reasoning and delinquency. The exogenous variables that impacted the former were attitudes toward school, personal safety, support for the police, locus of control and self-esteem.

Given the sensitivity to the large sample size, alternate fit indices were used. The CFI and NFI were .91 and .90 indicated a good but not optimal fit. By revising the model, legal reasoning had a stronger direct effect on delinquency and a positive impact on both social responsibility and obligation. For the original model, the power of delinquency was falsely being forced through the path of legal reasoning. In the original model, social responsibility had a very negative effect on delinquency, -.1.20 unstandardized, -.73 standardized.

According to the researcher, when the direct effect from legal reasoning to delinquency was revised, the relationship changed to a more positive influence. Support for the police also had a slightly negative impact on legal reasoning, which raises concerns about the demographics of society and discrimination within. The researcher did mention the problems with corruption and its affect on support for the police. If individuals sensed law enforcement is corrupt and do not show support for law enforcement, that doesn't necessarily mean people wouldn't support the law if

backed by morals and ethics. Many individuals are able to distinguish between corruption and right from wrong. Grant (2004) suggests that future research be conducted to allow for a more concrete measure of legal context because a reliance on perceptions of just law enforcement is too vulnerable to other factors unique to the individual rather than society.

Black males' attitudes about the law:

Still yet, legal socialization theorists note that environmental factors can hinder or advance legal reasoning (Finckenauer, 1995; Jones-Brown, 1997; Grant, 2004). Finckenauer (1995) states that voluntary compliance with the law needs to be seen as deserving of compliance and respect and whether one is compliant or not depends on one's sense of morality, which may correlate or counter formal law. Additionally, self-interest may be affected by both micro and macro-level concerns such as gaining or not gaining the approval of peers (Finckenauer, 1995; Jones-Brown, 1997). Due to the historically racialized environment of the United States, where blacks many times had to disobey the law to achieve equality, a legitimacy deficit exists among blacks.

Jones-Brown (1997) uses legal socialization theory to assess the attitudes and perceptions of black male youth towards the law. Her research seeks to determine if existence within a historically racialized legal environment affects thoughts about the law and law-violating behavior for black youth. As Jones-Brown points out, most of the studies on legal socialization focuses more on class or refers to black youth reasoning at a lower level than white youth. Kohlberg (1971) credits the former to differences in actual participation in social groups and institutions, while Fodor (1969) finds no significant difference in moral reasoning among white and black youth. Tapp and Levine (1970) finds black and white youth views did not differ, but blacks were less likely to view teachers as effective rule enforcers and more likely to see the police as severe punishers (cited in Jones-Brown, 1997).

Jones-Brown research addresses how black males experience the law. She collects cross-sectional data from black males to assess how they experience the law cognitively, emotively, and behaviorally. Chi-square analysis is conducted to see if perceptions of legitimacy varied among blacks by class. A quasi-experimental design is used to examine if the experiences of black and white youth differ. Additionally for the aggregate sample, the variables in the contextual, cognitive, and emotive dimensions were examined to assess if they correlate with self-reported delinquent behavior (Jones-Brown, 1997). The total sample consists of 150 males, 125 black and 25 white who elected to be part of the study, although the original research aimed to match the groups equally. Students completed a modified version of the Internalization of Legal Values Inventory and took part in focus group sessions.

The findings for cognitive dimensions indicate that knowledge of law is significantly correlated with delinquency. Hence, those with less knowledge and black youth had higher delinquency index scores. The research indicated that law-related education would be useful in the school curriculum. The study does not support the contention that increased knowledge of the law affects the way one reasons about the law; legal reasoning is not significantly correlated with knowledge. The study does not support the notion that blacks and lower socioeconomic status youth had less reasoning ability than whites or higher SES youth. Legal knowledge is more easily measured than legal reasoning. Jones-Brown also finds a legitimacy deficit among the target population. The deficit in the emotive dimension suggests that there is a significant implication for behavior.

Since most research that addresses delinquent behavior focuses on class not race, Jones-Brown's study emphasizes the need to focus on the significance of race and how it affects law abiding behavior, especially since earlier studies identified African Americans as having lower

legal and moral reasoning than other groups. Paramount to her study, Jones-Brown identified that much of earlier research on law-abiding behavior begins from a consensus standpoint. This beginning ignores the history of unjust laws in the United States that had to be broken mainly by minority groups before any type of “equality” (quotations are for emphasis) was born. Assumptions of the ideal relationship between people and the law include:

1. Law performs a singular and acceptable function and those who run afoul of the law do so because of personal characteristics, not because of characteristics of the law and its machinery,
2. Prior to the delinquent act, all individuals enjoyed the same relationship with the law and legal institutions (Jones-Brown, 1997, p. 6-7).

Thus, as Jones-Brown notes, the racialized legal context and law are not recognized. Because of this, any intervention designed to prevent or rectify delinquent behavior aimed at all populations may fall short and not take into account differential relationships that may exist. Black males are over-involved in the criminal justice system stemming from historical reasons. Jones-Brown’s study pioneers the examination of the over-involvement of minorities in the penal system despite earlier attempts, e.g. political socialization and moral and legal development, to infuse race.

The study finds that attitudes about the law over contextual variables most significantly explain disobedient behaviors of black males. The findings suggest that formal legal mechanisms may not effectively reduce delinquency among black males, partly because of a legitimacy deficit (Jones-Brown, 1997). In actuality, the study suggests that more punitive formal measures adopted by the juvenile justice system may contribute to increased delinquency rather than lowering it by depleting the legitimacy of law and the criminal justice system for black youth (Jones Brown, 1997). Instead of spending more tax dollars on detention centers and prisons, the government should incorporate more interventions that include civic law for peers and families to enhance legitimacy (Jones-Brown, 1997). Additionally, mentors who resemble students and not the

majority white middle-class may also increase legitimacy. Although the target group in the study believed they obeyed the law out of fear, their responses to various questions revealed that there are other factors that influence their behavior, e.g. formal and informal legal agents. For instance, black male youth particularly harbored negative feelings for police.

The limitations of the study noted by the researcher recognize that the relationship between the individual and the law is multifaceted. Jones-Brown (1997) focuses on race, values, attitudes and selected environmental factors, e.g. SES. Additionally, no significant associations between variables and delinquency are found most likely due to the small sample size, self-selection bias, which also limits the generalizability of the study. Jones-Brown (1997) does note that although the results were unique to her study, the findings were consistent with other research. More importantly, as a group, black youth were not found to be more delinquent. In fact, the finding that whites were more delinquent runs contrary to official statistics, which is also similarly found for other crimes, e.g. drug related crimes (Drug Policy Organization, 2007).

Tying it all together:

By beginning with social reproduction theory, incorporating the intersection between class and race, and then examining legal socialization theory, this study seeks to address the educational and incarceration disparities between black and white youth. The over-involvement of blacks in the penal system is well documented (see Travis, 2005; Drug Policy Alliance, 2007, Pettit & Western, 2004; Western, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2003), but as stated previously most researchers begin their analysis from a consensus standpoint. This beginning does not take into account historical circumstances. Similarly, when reviewing black males' progress or lack thereof in education, it is crucial to have alternative modes of assessing their circumstances, which is why this study is concerned with speaking to the at risk group themselves.

Researchers note educational disparities exist across social class where middle class black males significantly lag behind white peers on standardized tests and grade point averages (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2003; Ellis, 2004). It is important to note that this research does not assume the counterculture theory, which assumes black males avoid academics because they don't want to be perceived as "acting white." It is well documented that blacks value education. There are also examples of black students who excel academically while also maintaining a strong sense of cultural pride (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Ellis, 2004).

In Pedro Noguera's (2003) research in Northern California schools, 90% of black males indicated "agree" or "strongly agree" to questions such as "I think education is important" and "I want to go to college." However, only 22% responded affirmatively to questions such as "I work hard to achieve good grades" and only 18% indicated affirmatively "My teachers treat me fairly" (as cited in Ellis, 2004). Noguera's later study confirmed that teacher expectations of students are extremely important for black students. He finds black males were least likely to respond positively to statements such as "My teachers support me and care about my success in their class" (as cited in Ellis, 2004). Ferguson (2002) also finds teacher encouragement as critical for students of color, where 47% of blacks cite encouragement as crucial compared to 31% of whites.

Hence, an evaluation of the discrepancies between the desire to achieve in higher education, the effort put forth in school, and teacher expectations suggest the need for more support structures in and beyond schools (Ellis, 2004). Considering the importance of teacher expectation especially for black male students, this research and theoretical framework highlights the importance of race and explains how social reproduction happens through schools.

Chapter II

What the Literature says about Black Males in Education

This section reviews the relevant literature on the state of black males in education, impact of race relations on education, literature on recidivism and its correlation with high school drop out rates. Recent advances being made to improve the performance of black males are also examined.

State of black males in education:

Much of the literature on black males focuses on their underachievement in education compared to other groups of students. Large disparities exist for black students even after controlling for income and parent education levels (Holzman, 2004; College Board, 1999). The national high school graduation rate for black males is only 60% of what it is for white males, and in some states, the gap nears 50% (Holzman, 2006). Data from the National Assessment Education Progress (NAEP) in 2000 reveals that while scores generally have increased since 1980, the gap has widened between white and black students, even controlling for parental education and social class (cited in Holzman, 2004; Sadowski, 2001).

Some contend the achievement gap will not be closed without adequate examination of culture, personal attitudes, and lifestyle factors of black students. Accordingly, some maintain anti-education messages in the media, in the community, and in the homes hinder academic success (McShepard, Goler, & Batson, 2007). Proponents of this theory maintain the negative effects of hip-hop perpetuate the achievement gap. Even though hip-hop culture and or the media may influence students negatively, this research asserts that it is not the main factor because other groups, such as white students, listen to hip-hop and many young white males are increasingly wearing their pants hanging off of their buttocks. Further, one cannot assume that all black males are not doing well and for those who are not, the assumption cannot be the cause is the same.

Correspondingly, the authors of the report noted that white males did not fare much better than black males in the district¹ with the worst graduation rates for black males. For instance, only 19% of black males in Cleveland graduated with their cohort in the 2001-2002 school year. The report also noted that white males did not fare much better, with a 24% graduation rate (McShepard, et. al, 2007). Thus, the culture and learned negative attitudes of black males cannot be the only culprit for underachieving.

An ethnographic study of student educational achievement in Shaker Heights, Ohio shows an achievement gap between black and white students even among higher income levels (Ogbu, 2003). Even though close to 32% of the black households and 58% of whites had incomes of more than \$50,000, a sizeable amount in this suburb of Cleveland, and 85% of the approximately 5,000 students in the Shaker Height district go to college, of whom 52% are black, a gap still persisted.

In order to examine the reasons the achievement gap existed in this well to do town, anthropologist John Ogbu (2003) along with his research assistant moved to Shaker Heights for nine months in 1997, reviewed data, test scores, observed 110 different classes from Kindergarten to high school, and conducted exhaustive interviews with school personnel, black parents, and students. The grade point averages between white and black 7th-11th graders were approximately one letter grade. Blacks earned a dismal 1.9 GPA on average, while whites maintained a 3.45. Blacks on average lagged behind on standardized tests scores and enrollment in advanced placement and honor courses.

Ogbu (2003) finds that the students' own attitudes and those of their parents were responsible for poor academic performance. Black parents moved to the area, paid high taxes so their children can attain an education from a prominent district but their role stopped there. The

¹ Cleveland and Cincinnati tied for the worst graduation rates among 58 districts that serve a large number of black male students (cited in McShepard, et. al, 2007).

parents believed the district should take care of the rest and did not spend much time with their children reviewing schoolwork. According to his findings, the students put little effort into schoolwork. Additionally, Ogbu (2003) reports peer culture, the idea of acting white, speaking Standard English, and not enrolling in advanced courses, as a huge inhibitor to academic success. Ogbu (1995) identifies a core distinction in his research that is central to academic success or failure: the idea of involuntary versus involuntary immigration.

According to this theory, people who voluntarily immigrate to the United States usually do better than involuntary immigrants do. Because involuntary immigrants joined American society against their will, they tend to see Standard English being imposed on them (Ogbu, 1995). Cultural assimilation is usually easier for those who immigrate to America because their culture is not generally regarded as inferior but different. African American culture is not embraced in traditional institutions, this shunning leads to a negative school experience for many black American youth. Ogbu (2003) maintains that neither the Ibo nor the Chinese see it that way. Nonetheless, Ogbu's research is flawed because he doesn't do any comparative studies with whites in Shaker Heights. He draws big conclusions without doing much comparison. Most criticize him for his beliefs and contend that Ogbu fails to acknowledge the experiences of blacks in America, which include the systemic robbing of identity and dehumanizing that has endured since slavery (see Ferguson, 2001; Horvat & Lewis, 2003).

Ferguson (2001) offers an oppositional culture perspective in response to the acting white theory purported by Ogbu (2003). According to Ferguson (2001), blacks strive for a distinct identity that is in opposition to the Other, not whites but the cultural system of white superiority that has continually degraded blacks:

Among its essential features is the drive to maintain a shared sense of African American identity that is distinct from (that is, in opposition to) the Other . . . the Other is not white people, especially as individuals. Instead, the Other is the cultural system of white superiority within which negative racial stigma is kept alive and out of which insinuations of black inferiority and marginality emanate. black racial solidarity serves as a mechanism of mutual validation and a shield . . . any apparent attempt by a black person to escape the stigma of race by joining the Other—by speaking and behaving in ways that appear to seek an exemption from the stigma while leaving it unchallenged—may meet the accusation of acting white. (p. 377-378)

Other researchers find peer influence on achievement not to be an indicator of academic success or failure. Fries-Britt (1998) reports many blacks enter the higher learning environment with few if any relationships with other high achieving same race peers. Early in their academic career, these individuals learn the value of code switching, that is the ability to assimilate to white culture when in the setting by becoming bi-cultural. High achievers rely on special programs for minorities to meet other black high achievers and unfortunately become accustomed to blacks not doing well academically. Still yet, some students reveal that they conceal their academic success to fit in with the larger black population on campus, and some although they appreciate the special programs, long for a connection to the larger academic community on campus (Fries-Britt, 1998).

Bonner (2001) studies two gifted black males, one at a HBCU, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and the other at a TWI, Traditional White Institution, to learn more about their perceptions of education and the institutions that they attended. The qualitative study examines six categories, relationships with faculty, peers, family influence support, factors for college selection, self-perception, and institutional environment. The study uses a purposeful sample and finds Stephen who attends the HCBU had better relationships with his faculty and support from his peers, while Trey, who attends the TWI, defines the school environment to be more competitive and inequitable. Trey also admits that he does not wear his academic prowess on his sleeves, while

Stephen finds his environment as nurturing and comfortably displays his academic abilities. Bonner does not describe how peer support is derived or the strategies Trey and Stephen use to garner same race support (cited in Harper, 2006).

Recently researchers using a newly available data set provide profound insight into the black-white achievement gap. Using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, researchers conclude the black-white test gap disappears for incoming kindergartners when controlling for small covariates (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). The authors contribute their findings to better covariates available, more gains by blacks in recent years e.g. entry into the middle class and professional fields. After the first two years of schooling, the researcher finds that blacks lose substantial ground compared to other races (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). The researchers find suggestive evidence in school quality e.g. presence of gangs, as an indicator to lower achievement but received no real empirical support for why blacks continue to lag behind other groups.

Possible reasons for the achievement gap have fueled a debate among scholars. Ferguson (2001) contends the difference is due to skill levels, not black opposition to achievement or disinterest in school as other scholars such as John Ogbu (2003) posit. This debate has led to the conclusion that poverty alone cannot account for the educational disparities between black males and other students.

Black men remain under-represented in all areas of education and employment and over-represented in the penal system, which make the plight of black men a grave concern to this nation. Myriad statistics attest to the disproportionately lower achievement rates of black males in education. Beginning in the early years, black males face poor academic performance throughout the K-12 school system, low rates of retention and graduation from institutions of higher learning, and overwhelming rates of unemployment and incarceration (BMI Task Force, 2005). Although

not all black males lag behind, there are success stories, see Harper, 2005; Maton et. al, 1998, the numbers of those who lag behind are alarming. In most school districts, close to 70% of black males who enter ninth grade do not graduate along with their peers four years later (Holzman, 2004). Young black men lag behind black girls and other groups of students in achievement. The number of male students who graduate nationally from high schools with a standard diploma in four years is 72.3% white, 52.3% Hispanic, and 46.2 black respectively (Gewertz, 2007).

As of 2006, there were 172,000 black males students, 16% of enrollment, in New York City Schools (Holzman & Hyman, 2007; New York City Department of Education, 2006). 77,000 were in elementary schools, 34,000 in middle schools, and 44,000 in high schools, while another 12,000 were placed in alternative settings, such as disciplinary or special education programs. In ninth grade, there were approximately 17,000 black males, but four years later only 26% of them were in 12th grade and even fewer graduate and go on to attend higher education institutions (Holzman & Hyman, 2007). For the same year, there were 2,603 black male freshmen in CUNY schools, 885 CUNY graduates, and 100 in CUNY receiving master degrees (Holzman & Hyman, 2007).

According to the United States Census Bureau (2000), there are approximately five million black boys between five and 19 years of age in the United States, who make up 14% of all African Americans, two percent of the nation's population, and 15% of all boys in that age range. Three suburban districts in Maryland, Baltimore, Montgomery, and Prince Georges Counties together enroll the third largest amount of black males in the nation, over 85,000, with virtually no achievement gap between black and white males in the United States as a whole (Holzman, 2004). They are three times as successful as New York City and twice as successful as Chicago (Holzman, 2004). According to Holzman (2004), there is a gender gap across all races in education

where females are surpassing males academically from K-12. However, the gap is highest between black males and black girls, from the same homes and communities, where on average 60% of black males fail high school.

Thirteen states graduated black males at a rate lower than the national average in the 2001-2002 school year. Even states with a small number of black males, e.g. North Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming have graduation rates above the national average for white males (Holzman, 2004). Of states with larger populations, New Jersey is the only one that graduates black males with their cohort at a rate higher than the national average for white males. The largest gaps are in the south (Holzman, 2004). The largest numbers of black males in the country are educated in New York City, which has evoked considerable interest from public and private ventures to improve educational outcomes for young black men (Holzman & Hyman, 2007).

Researchers note that there is limited data disaggregated across race and gender available to develop solutions and implement initiatives to ensure accountability for all students, which would also help stakeholders garner support to increase outcomes for black males (Holzman & Hyman, 2007). An analysis by Camille Gibson (2002), finds teacher expectation and the student teacher relationship to be an important factor in predicting black male delinquency in Bronx, NY. Gibson's analysis of public education in two schools, one traditional public and one alternative, finds teacher rapport with students to be an important factor when evaluating student experiences in schools.

Her analysis examined many different themes, such as socioeconomic status, family and communal life, within group variations of blacks, peer influences, and individual risk traits, e.g. ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), among other factors to assess the plight of black males in education. Gibson maintains that the greater positive interactions with teachers, the less likely the student would be delinquent. Students consistently referred to teachers who *kept it*

real as sincere and competent in their teaching background. Teachers who *kept it real* were described by students as effective teachers who communicate well with students and who also teach life skills. Teachers who *keep it real* are able to impart social capital, and thus said teachers should be readily employed in districts that serve at risk students. Contrarily, black males in New York City are more likely to be taught by teachers teaching out of their area of certification (Holzman & Hyman, 2007).

Impact of race relations on education:

After the unanimous Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 struck down the “separate by equal” doctrine and the civil rights movement of the 1960s, people of color continue to lag far behind whites in access to employment, opportunity, and education. Research shows that blacks and Latinos are under-represented in higher education institutions and professional employment, while they are over-represented in high school drop out and incarceration rates (Ogletree, Jr., 2007; Eaton & McArdle, 2007).

In 2007, the Supreme Court dealt a severe blow to integration efforts that many school districts have adopted across the country. The Court ruled it is unconstitutional to integrate schools based on race, even if it means a racially diverse atmosphere. Justice Kennedy maintains that the school districts must use other means to the classification of students by race as he cast his fifth vote in the 5-4 decision in the case against the Seattle and Louisville school districts (*Parents Involved in the Community Schools v. Seattle School District, No. 05-908 & 05-915*, 2007).

This decision will not help integrate some of the most segregated districts in the nation. A prime example would be New York City. In the city, there are 32 school districts with an estimate of 50%, 87,000, of black male students enrolled in only six of the 32 districts: 5, 11, 17, 18, 22, 29 (Holzman & Hyman, 2007). Twenty percent, 35,000, of black male students attend schools in

Region 6, located in central Brooklyn (Holzman & Hyman 2007). More than 70% of students attending schools in Districts: 5, 11, and 17 qualify for free lunch, 60% qualify in District 29 and 52% in Districts 18 and 22 (Holzman & Hyman, 2007). Segregated schools and the unfortunate Supreme Court decision will continue to affect students of color adversely. Research shows that segregated schools do worse than integrated schools, larger schools do worse than smaller schools; thus large segregated schools perform even more poorly (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Holzman, 2006).

School environment influences the learning experience. In a report titled, “Criminalizing the Classroom: the over-policing of NYC Schools,” the researchers document the excesses of the New York City school policing program and offer realistic recommendations for change (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007). While disagreeing with increased police presence in inner city schools, the report recognizes both students and teachers are entitled to a safe environment that is conducive to learning. However, the massive deployment of inadequately trained police personnel makes the school environment very hostile and dysfunctional (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007).

According to the researchers, statistical analysis reveals that not all students are likely to experience this hostile environment equally. The schools, which are attended by the city’s most underprivileged, are burdened with permanent metal detectors. The victims of this hostile environment are mainly poor, black and Latino students who are more likely than their white peers to be confronted by police for non-criminal offenses (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007). The same children grossly receive less per-pupil funding than their peers citywide do. The schools these underprivileged students attend are overcrowded, large, and have unusually high dropout and suspension rates (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007).

Many recommendations are listed in the report. The suggestions aim to reform New York City's school policing program and would not comprise school safety. The researchers suggest that authority over school safety should be restored to the school administrators who are trained to function in an academic environment as opposed to the street environment. The role of police should be limited to legitimate concerns for safety, students, and families. Additionally, educators should be given meaningful channels for reporting wrongdoing by school-based police such as the Civilian Complaint Review Board (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007). The researchers maintain that children of color should not be forced to attend an academic environment that mirrors a criminal environment. The researchers assert the prison-like environment contributes to black youth lagging behind their white counterparts substantially, because such a setting prepares the nation's youth for prisons by replicating the prison environment (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007).

The lingering of racial inequalities in institutions such as schools results from a variety of conscious and unconscious factors. Institutional racism, intentional discrimination, and unacknowledged racism continue to affect all aspects of life for people of color, even though "race-neutral" laws have been enacted in efforts to make a colorblind society. In efforts to not recognize color, policymakers are doing society an injustice because a colorblind society will not end discrimination. Rather there is a need to reduce high school drop rates, prevent over-incarceration of people of color and initiate measures that aim to engage at risk youth in attaining a high school diploma and college degree.

Considering the costs to society of high drop out rates, increased incarceration and drug use, the estimated monetary value of saving an at risk youth ranges from \$1.9 to \$2.7 million dollars (Ellis 2004, Cohen 1995). If black males have an increased likelihood of being involved in the penal system, then programs aimed at supporting these youth need to be employed, e.g. college

preparation courses, leadership training, community and after school support, and civic courses (Eaton & McArdle, 2007). Programs involving higher education are crucial to reversing the economic costs incurred from high drop out rates (Ellis, 2004; Polite & Davis, 1999).

With efforts to implement solutions, experts continue to wrestle with the causes of juvenile delinquency, which range from weak family networks, lack of parental involvement, impoverished homes, low teacher expectation, and weak schools. There appears to be a cultural disconnect between black youth and mainstream institutions, where black youth instructed by mainly white middle class teachers lag considerable behind their white counterparts. Arguably, this research maintains that members of society in an effort to reduce high school dropout rates and criminal involvement should look for means outside of the control of black children and family, and push policymakers and government to implement programs aimed at this group as a proactive measure (Holzman, 2006; Kozol, 1991; 2005).

Social activist and educator, Jonathan Kozol visited 60 schools in 11 states over a five year period and found that many schools were spiraling to the Pre-Brown era. He contends that students are worse off today than they were ten years ago. Instruction has been replaced with testing in the height of the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind legislation. Many urban, low-income districts are forced to push test prep, while upper class districts continue to enjoy the fruits of enrichment (Kozol, 2005).

According to Kozol, the number of black students attending racially integrated schools is at an all time low, lowest level since 1968. Within integrated schools, white children are geared towards gifted, advanced placement and honors classes, a practice referred to as gatekeeping in education, while blacks and Latinos are over classified for special education programs, even after controlling for income, and once identified less likely than whites to receive their entitled services

(Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Losen & Orfield, 2002). The number of blacks receiving special services is alarming, and occurs in some of the wealthiest school districts, leading to segregation within an integrated school (Losen, 2002a). Blacks are almost three times more likely to be classified as mentally retarded and twice as likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed (McNally, 2003). Some attribute the former to poverty, less than adequate environments, pre-natal care and diet, but that argument is refuted with the over classification of black males, not black females, in special education (McNally, 2003).

Once classified, blacks are less likely to be mainstreamed. Blacks also receive a disproportionate number of disciplinary referrals than whites (Losen, 2002b). Frequency of suspension influences learning with less time spent in the classroom. Black youth comprise 17% of the population, but 33% of those classified as mentally retarded and suspended and only 8% of those classified as gifted. white youth, on the other hand, account for 63% of the population and 76% are classified as gifted, 54% as mentally retarded, and 50% of whites are suspended (Losen, 2002b). Thirty-seven percent of special educated blacks are in full inclusion (spend less than 21% of the time outside of the regular education setting) courses, while 55% of whites are. Blacks constitute 32.7% of those educated in substantially separate settings (spend 60% or more time outside of regular education courses), and whites make up only 15.9% (Losen, 2002b).

Gatekeeping, which involves the process of course selection that begins in early years and continues throughout high school limiting access to challenging curriculum, increases the divide between black males and other groups of students (Civil Rights Project Harvard University, 2008). Because school districts have developed systems that determine course placement, this systemic design serves as a gatekeeper (Civil Rights Project HU, 2008). For instance, some schools use a number of predictors such as recommendations, guidance, parents' choice, test scores and grades

received, while others use a rigid tracking system. Gatekeeping can be a result of parent and student choice input, but also persists if there is a lack of prerequisite courses in schools limiting enrollment in advanced courses. Lack of knowledge can also affect gatekeeping, where some students aren't properly informed of their options or are steered to lower tracking. The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (2008) reports that racial and ethnic makeup can adversely affect gatekeeping because some guidance counselors may encourage people of color to take lower level courses. I can attest to the former.

When I moved from an urban school district to a suburban district in seventh grade, the school decided that a lower placement was in my best interest. Fortunately, my mother, my report card and my academic ability only landed me in that environment for approximately two weeks. I do remember there was no learning occurring. It was the most fun that I had. All my friends were in the class, and I enjoyed their short-lived company. That experience was quite a revelation, for it was clear that the teachers' expectations had been extremely low. Once, I moved to the appropriate level, learning returned as did increased teacher expectation, albeit that was not my only experience with racism, gatekeeping and education.

Another time would be class registration in the library three years later, when my guidance counselor attempted to place me in a lower level science course for the upcoming year. Because I saw how my mother handled it several years earlier, I was equipped to handle the situation. I simply approached my science teacher to inform him of my guidance counselor's decision. My science teacher marched over to the table and informed my guidance counselor at once that I was an excellent student and the rest is history.

A similar scenario occurred to a young girl whom my younger sisters are friends with involving the same guidance counselor, ironically. She had been classified with a learning

disability, but was denied access to college preparatory classes. One summer in the upward bound program at the local college during the SAT preparation course that I was teaching, she revealed that she would taking recordkeeping her senior year. I told her to talk to her guidance counselor, still unfamiliar to our shared connection, to take algebra and other college preparation courses. Years later at dinner, she told me that he refused to place her in an algebra class. She then pleaded with her father, who like the parents in Ogbu's study left such decisions to the school, to speak to her counselor. After being cajoled, he agreed. She ended up taking algebra along with a geometry course. She did well in both courses receiving Bs and better. After high school she went off to college, graduated with honors, and now is applying to teach English to special education students.

Unfortunately, many students are not self-advocators and many parents and students are not aware of the grave consequences of tracking. To compound the issues of gatekeeping, in inner city classrooms, black students are placed in classrooms with teachers who have less experience or who may be less prepared to teach in their content area (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999; Holzman & Hyman, 2007). For instance, in New York City, close to 90% of black students are not taught by highly qualified teachers, teachers teaching out of their certification area or with no certification (Holzman & Hyman, 2007). Statewide, 7% of teachers are teaching out of certification and 5% of core classes are not taught by highly qualified teachers (Holzman & Hyman, 2007; New York State School Report Cards, 2005-2006). In District 18, 16% of core classes are not taught by highly qualified teachers, which is three times the national average (Holzman & Hyman, 2007). Black men being taught by less than qualified teachers in segregated schools is counterproductive to closing the achievement gap. Negative experiences in school most likely will not produce positive attitudes about education, thus leading to increased delinquency and possibly higher drop out rates.

Recidivism and its correlation with high school drop out rates:

Unjust treatment outside of school continues the dehumanizing of blacks, which stems from historical circumstances and colonization. Black males are continually emasculated from countless encounters with police, raids and searches of their persons and impoverished communities. Ridiculing and labeling in schools, penal systems, and employment also exacerbate the inequalities. Studies confer that white males with a prison record are more likely to be hired over a black male without one (Travis, 2005). In schools, black males are more likely than white males to be classified as needing special education, and are more likely to be stopped by police. The results are stigmas, lower teacher expectation, feelings of disconnect, higher drop out rates and later involvement in the penal systems.

There is a strong correlation between the high school drop out rate to the number of prison inmates, which begin in impoverished communities and schools. Sixty-eight percent of state inmates report not receiving a high school diploma (BJS Education & Correctional Populations, 2003). According to the Institute for Race & Justice, the school to prison pipeline affects men of color disproportionately who are often taught by unqualified educators in overcrowded and inadequate facilities (Eaton & McArdle, 2007). Black youth are suspended at higher rates, classified in special education programs, expelled and arrested for minor infractions, kept back, sent to alternative schools at higher rates than white youth before being pushed out or dropping out of schools. The former increases the likelihood of being incarcerated triple-fold (Eaton & McArdle, 2007).

Over-involvement in the criminal justice system:

Because, a system of disparity exists at all levels in American life, blacks are under-represented in all areas of education and employment, while they are over-represented in the

nation's penal system. The disparity has largely been the result of history, current drug enforcement policy, incarceration rates and juvenile justice in the penal system. Generally, blacks are more likely arrested than whites for criminal offenses, convicted and sent to prison, and referred for prosecution (Travis, 2005).

The incarceration rates of black men far out number those of whites or Hispanics. In 2003, for black men, there were 3,405 per 100,000 incarcerated compared to 1,231 for Hispanic men and 465 for white men (BMI Task Force, 2005). In 2001, black men had a 32% lifetime chance of being sent to prison, compared to a 13.4% chance in 1974 (BMI Task Force, 2005). An increase can also be seen for Hispanic men 4.0% to 17.2% and much lower for whites, 2.2% to 5.9% (BMI Task Force, 2005). The result of such increases in incarceration has had exacerbating impacts on black communities not only black males.

Black men are more likely than white men to have their lives defined by periods of incarceration, which disrupts their communities. Black women are left largely feeling the brunt of black males' over-involvement in the penal systems. Black women must continue to head households, raise black male children to be less assertive and aggressive in hopes of instilling survival skills in a white dominated society (Grier & Cobbs, 1991). In addition, drug enforcement policies such as the crack versus powder cocaine distinction have been known to fuel the prison industrial complex. For example, in the 1980s, when legal responses to crack cocaine began, the number of incarcerated blacks grew sharply, much more than any other race (Tonry, 1995; 1996; Spohn, 2000; Reinerman & Levine, 1997).

The war on drugs has allowed the prison industrial complex to profit from discriminatory practices of arrests, convictions, and sentencing patterns. Racially, the victims of the war on drugs show a symbiotic relationship between poverty and institutional racism stemming from

colonialism. Political disenfranchisement (48 states including the District of Columbia prohibit inmates from voting while incarcerated for a felony²) and economic inequality have been evident since the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and is apparent today with the racist enforcement of drug laws. For many descendants of slaves in America, the war on drugs has continued the disruption of the black community and replaced the institution of chattel slavery with prisoners (Small, 2001). According to John Fleteau (1996):

Metaphorically, the criminal justice pipeline is like a slave ship, transporting human cargo along interstate triangular trade routes from black and brown communities; through the middle passage of police precincts, holding pens, detention centers and courtrooms to downstate jails or upstate prisons back to communities as unrehabilitated escapees; and back to prison or jail in a vicious recidivist cycle (cited in Drug Policy Alliance, 2007).

To someone without an informed history and for one who begins his analysis from a consensus standpoint, the aforementioned would seem implausible. Given the current rhetoric, which blames criminals for their status completely, most, especially the ones that have the power to make a difference such as policymakers do not acknowledge the structural ills (e.g. racism and classism) that contribute to increased incarceration. This is not to say that criminals shouldn't be held liable for their conduct. Rather than solely incarcerating non-violent drug offenders and even violent offenders, rehabilitative services in the form of drug and behavioral treatment, education aimed to prevent dropping out of school, and work skills should be offered.

Whether people realize it or not, the same violent and non-violent offenders will be released back into society alongside law abiders. Surely, law abiders would prefer a reformed criminal armed with tools to survive in a capitalist society versus someone who has been

² Each state has its own process for restoring voting rights that remain so cumbersome where few take advantage. Similarly during slavery and after many Blacks were prohibited from voting- literacy requirements. 1.4 million (13%) Black men are disenfranchised- seven times the national average (Sentencing Project, 2007).

warehoused in an environment that is socialized for a violent existence. The prison experience, the placing of people in cages, counting them several times a day, distorts the individual. This is evident in the works of writers Eldridge Cleaver (1968) and Jack Abbott (1982), regardless of their views, albeit controversial; their works highlight the power dynamics, violence and misogyny that prisons produce. It should surprise no one that our nation's prisons are breeding grounds for hate and gang activity.

Yet again, if we take a look at history, it sheds light on why a system that destroys so many lives, by and large persons of color continues. Instead of using punitive measures, proactive means should be employed such as increasing educational outcomes for all students and diverting first time offenders. Contrarily, the United States imprisons people, largely non-violent black drug offenders, at an astronomical rate, thus being the world's leader with over two million people in prison and jail: a 500% increase in the last 30 years (The Sentencing Project, 2007).

Recent advances being made to improve the performance of black males in NYC:

In May of 2004, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein of CUNY initiated Master Plan 2004-2008 on the Black Male in Education as a means to help black males overcome many inequalities that hinder academic development from K-12 and beyond (BMI Task Force, 2005). Chancellor Goldstein established the University Task Force, comprised of faculty members and administrators with relevant expertise to help increase opportunities for black males. In addition to serving on the University Task Force, members of the faculty were asked to serve as directors of Working Groups who would examine issues and present them to the Task Force (BMI Task Force, 2005). The task force was charged with developing recommendations for projects aimed at increasing academic achievement, college retention as well as lowering joblessness, drop out rates and criminal justice involvement.

There were five working groups as follows: Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 12, Higher Education, Criminal Justice, Employment, and Social Relations. Each Group presented convincing evidence that black males in New York City endure discrimination in education, employment, and the criminal justice system. Numerous recommendations were given which include establishing strong school leadership, increasing the school to college pipeline, increasing admission and graduation rates at CUNY institutions, and educating a new generation of teachers for our nation's children (BMI Task Force, 2005). Additionally, the Pre-Kindergarten to twelfth grade group recommends a need to address non-cognitive variables that affect educational achievement, such as self-esteem and leadership skills for black males early in their academic careers. The group also reports that gatekeeping of predictive disciplines such as Math and English inhibit student success. It is recommended that support structures be created for students no later than fifth grade, e.g. colleges working directly with cohorts of students, along with collaborative efforts from community members, guidance counselors, parents, and teachers. The former initiatives are underway as the federal investigation filed by Meyers continues.

Meyers, who filed the complaint against the BMI, is also a stark rival of using gender conscious practices aimed at helping students in need. Even though research has found single sex schools and classes to be fruitful, much of the research on the effects of single sex schools remains ambiguous. Some contend after controlling for abilities and SES, many of the effects disappear (see Harker & Nash, 1997; LePore & Warren, 1997). There are successful cases, though. According to the National Association of Single Sex Schools (2007), single sex education has profound effects on the educational experience. Upon completing a three year pilot study and controlling for class size, teacher training, experience, and demographics of a fourth grade class, researchers at Stetson University found boys scored 37% proficiency on the FCAT (Florida

Comprehensive Assessment Test) in coed classes compared to 86% in single sex classes. Similarly, girls in coed classes scored 59% proficiency compared to 75% proficiency in single sex classes.

Another study conducted by researchers at Cambridge University in England over a four-year period involving approximately 50 schools found separating the genders increased the ability to concentrate and improved exam grades (BBC News, 2005). The research on single-sex schools finds a less stereotypical view of subjects where boys perform better in reading and writing and girls better in math and science.

In the early 1990s, Principal Leah Hasty desiring a positive male role model for black boys enrolled in a Baltimore public elementary school created a class for boys only using a rare asset, a black male elementary educator (Cooper, 2006). The teacher coming from the same community many of the boys were from volunteered to teach a class of boys from grade to grade. The result was more attendance and eagerness to learn. Then Hasty broadened the experiment to include girls, boys and coeds, three classes per grade, and found the girls did far better than the boys, even though the boys did better. Due to political pressure, the experimental classes were shunned by the mid 1990s, but recent language in President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act has lessened rules, e.g. Title IX, against gender discrimination (Cooper, 2006; Gewertz, 2007). Within the last ten years, over 250 public schools now offer single sex classes.

According the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education, the setting helps children who traditionally struggle in school (Cooper, 2006; Gewertz, 2007). Scholars such as Pedro Noguera debate the effectiveness of single sex classes (Cooper, 2006). Noguera contends that there is no clear evidence single sex classes will help boys, although he does agree that the research helps girls because it was designed to counter gender stereotypes, such as boys doing better in

math and science. Noguera raises concerns of black boys being forced into single classes and maintains this could lead to “hyper-masculine environments” (as cited in Cooper, 2006 p.2).

Although scholars such as Dr. Noguera and Dr. Asa Hilliard debate the effectiveness of single sex schools amid more research, director-counsel and president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Theodore Shaw, states that although the organization is traditionally against segregating individuals, this may be an exception (as cited in Cooper, 2006). Due to the crisis of black males in the United States, scholars are willing to experiment and relax rules if the result is positive. Holland former director of Center for Educating African Americans at Morgan State University agrees with relaxing the legal arguments against single sex schools (Cooper, 2006). He asserts that our nation’s schools segregate black males de facto, from gatekeeping and over-classification in special education classes to prison.

One more approach to reduce the achievement gap is the Education Working Group, one of several working groups, launched by the Pipeline Crisis: Winning Strategies for Young Black Men. The working group’s national mandate aims to raise “academic performance, graduation rates and college and employment readiness” (Pipeline Crisis, Education Working Group, 2007). Given the severity of the issue, the working group will focus first on certain neighborhoods in New York City, then replicate, and expand targeted investments across New York City and the nation. Some short term goals to improve achievement among black men include designing a preliminary budget, raising funds to support infrastructure, identifying and selecting partner organizations, raising public awareness, heightening media attention, initiating dialogues from teachers, parents, and community members. Other short term goals involve providing volunteers to the NYC DOE and engaging corporate support. Some long term goals include:

1. Launching a set of targeted investments in Central Brooklyn and Harlem;

2. Garnering financial support for various teacher-related initiatives (e.g. skills programs, diversity programs geared at increasing black male teachers, incentive programs for service in high need areas servicing targeted constituency);
3. Supporting comprehensive research, including longitudinal studies, about black male educational achievement, and applying the researched based methodologies to affect the education of young black males positively (Pipeline Crisis, Education Working Group, 2007 p.2-3).

The working group focuses on specific geographic areas such as Harlem and Central Brooklyn where a high concentration of black males attend school. Additionally, the group contends there is no reliable data made available on the fate of approximately 172,000 black male students in New York City, but maintain various studies reveal substantial gaps in graduation rates. For instance, the Schott Foundation estimates the graduation rate for New York City's black males is 26% compared to 50% for white males. Contrarily, New York City Department of Education data show the rate of black males graduating to be 45.4% to 71.6% rate for white males (Holzman, 2004; Pipeline Crisis, Education Working Group, 2007).

Mayor Bloomberg maintains the graduation rate has risen by nearly 20% since he took office in 2002. The city's data, which differs slightly from the state, reports the graduation rate of the four largest ethnic groups in New York City surpassed 50% for the Class of 2006. The rate for Hispanics rose from 41.1% in 2002 to 50.8%, for blacks the rate rose from 44.4% in 2002 to 54.6%, for Asians the rate increased from 66.9% in 2002 to 74.5%, and for white students the rate increased from 70.5% in 2002 to 76.9%. The city's rates include summer school graduation rates, General Equivalency Degrees, and students in general education classes who earn Individualized Education Program (IEP) diplomas, while the state does not include the former group. Conversely, the state's data includes students who are in the most restricted environment, e.g. self-contained classes, a group the city does not include. Still yet, there is much room for continued improvement. Aware of this, policy experts and educators have been experimenting with many different ideas.

Other means employed to close the achievement gap include incentives to both teachers and students attending underperforming schools. Designed by the Harvard economist, Roland Fryer, schools that participate in the rewards program have seized the opportunity to improve schools by offering bonuses and incentives to teachers and principals and cash to students. Critics and proponents alike have weighed in on the notion of monetary reward for educational success. Critics maintain that paying a child or teacher for improving performance is daft and that children should be inspired to learn for the sake of knowledge not money. In anticipation of critics, the city began this experiment with private donations, avoiding the use of public funds and the controversy following the Baltimore experiment, which uses public funds (Medina, 2008).

Amid the ambivalence of incentives to teachers in New York City, the union insisted that bonus pools be given to entire schools to be divided by joint labor-management committees, either evenly amongst union members or individually to exceptional teachers (Medina, 2008). In the 2007-2008 school year, New York City gave more than \$500,000 to 5,237 students in 58 schools as rewards for taking some of the 10 standardized tests required during the year (Medina, 2008).

In the city, where the largest public school system in the United States exists, approximately 1400 schools, more than 200 schools are experimenting with incentives for improving performance. Teachers at Public School 188 on the Lower East Side of Manhattan were also eligible to receive bonuses of \$3,000, if students show evident improvement (Medina, 2008). The city, which is at the forefront of the movement that experiments with incentives, stands to test whether cash prizes can turn a school around and increase academic success for many underachieving students (Medina, 2008). Teachers at P.S. 188 report marked improvements in attitudes about learning among the students, which is attributed to the incentive programs (Medina, 2008).

Contrarily, the attitudes of seventh graders at J.H.S. 123 seemed much harder to sway. Although students maintained that receiving cash would make education more exciting and socially acceptable, when asked if the money should be used for scholarships, shouts of no filled the room (Medina, 2008). One student already influenced by societal factors that afflicts many black males in the nation, said, “We might not all go to college” (Medina, 2007 p.3). Both P.S. 188 and J.H.S. 123 intend to distribute the money received fairly to the whole school and desire to include secretarial and office staff (Medina, 2008).

In addition to cash prizes awarded to teachers and students, a new charter school set to open in 2009 in Washington Heights will test if higher pay for teachers is vital to improving student performance. The anticipated school will house fifth to eighth graders and pledges to pay \$125,000 and potential bonuses based on school-wide performance to teachers (Gootman, 2008). The experiment has received support and skepticism alike. Critics, such as Ernest Logan who is president of the city principals’ union maintained that paying principals less than teachers is absurd because cheapening the role of the school leader could cause chaos (Gootman, 2008). Conversely, Michael Duffy, the city’s executive director for charter schools, said that the new school could have a “tremendous impact” (Gootman, 2008, p. 2). Frederick Hess, the director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute contends the high pay could have an enormous impact (Gootman, 2008).

Opposite to the normal school hierarchy, principals will only receive \$90,000. The amount teachers will make at the new school, Equity Project, is almost twice as much as the average city public school teacher and over twice as much as the national average. The school’s initiator and first principal, Zeke Vanderhoek, contends the high salary will attract the best teachers. The teachers will face stringent standards, such as scoring in the 90th percentile on the verbal section of

the GRE, GMAT, or other similar exams. Teachers will be interviewed by phone, in person, and will have to supply evidence of their record of student achievement (Gootman, 2008). Students will be selected from a lottery of underperforming pupils who live in the vicinity.

Creations of new schools such as the former, has been an essential component of the city's reform efforts to close the achievement gap. Central to Mayor Bloomberg's Children First Initiative, as of September 2007, there were 232 new secondary schools, 10 new elementary schools and 60 charter schools in operation. The initiative is a professional development program that supports new teachers and school leaders in the new atmosphere of empowerment and data-driven accountability. The new schools are smaller, and at full capacity, it will house no more than 500 students. Some have themes, such as science, math, and leadership. The new schools hold all students to high standards, allow for personalization, and partnerships with community members, organizations, corporations, universities, and non-profit businesses (NYC DOE, 2008).

In addition to creating new schools, the state also approved the city's \$258 million plan to help at risk students. Close to 1,100 schools will benefit from the new aid, which includes plans to add 1,300 new teachers and 925 classes to reduce class size. The funds will also be used for implementing professional development for teachers and principals, restructuring middle and high schools, and expanding full day Kindergarten as means to close the achievement gap (NYC DOE, 2007).

Tying it all together:

Amid many of the developments intended to close the achievement gap such as new schools, research, and funding, this proposed research recognizes the importance of gathering information from the at risk population themselves to provide insight on methods to increase educational achievement. The main aims of the current research represent a slight modification of

the aims, questions, and assumptions of the larger CUNY Black Male Initiative. This study uses the same high school instrument as the CUNY study and anticipates like the larger study to add to the literature regarding the achievement gap between black males and other groups of students.

Recognizing that America has had a disparate legal context based on race, this research examines the possibility that racialized legal history and social reproduction impacts the target group's attitudes about education and the legal system, which in turn affects behavior. This study is concerned with factors that influence educational attitudes of black males. The hypotheses formulated for the current research are designed to get the general attitudes of education held by the target group and how that general image differs from that of its counter-part. The second aim, seeks to determine to what extent attitudes about institutions such as school and the legal system are related to compliance with the law and the general educational setting. These considerations have led to the following hypotheses:

Hypotheses:

- I. Black American males' perceptions and attitudes of education and the legal system differ from other groups of students.
- II. Black males lag behind other groups academically because of school policies and procedures, e.g. gatekeeping and over-classification in special education.
- III. Black males who attend large segregated schools with metal detectors will do far worse academically than other groups of students.
- IV. Black subjects are more likely to leave school due to economic reasons than other groups.
- V. Black males are more likely than other groups of students to be arrested, e.g. drug use or sale, than others.

- VI. Black males are more likely to do better academically when taught by highly qualified teachers (those who teach in area of certification).
- VII. Black males are more likely to have a positive educational experience when teacher expectation is high.
- VIII. Black males coming from strong support systems, either parental, communal or both, who attend high performing schools in New York City will have more positive attitudes about the educational experience and thus perform better academically than their black male peers.

Based on this research, I developed preliminary hypotheses regarding attitude and perceptions toward education for successful versus unsuccessful black males in New York City High Schools. I hypothesize that higher achieving black males' attitudes and perceptions toward education derive from stronger social networks either in the community, school or both, which include parental involvement, teacher-student relationship and expectation. It is argued that if social networks in the home and community are not strong, teacher-student relationship and expectation can overcome the weakened structure. If both social networks are strong, student achievement is higher. High achievement can occur with strong families and weak schools and weak schools and strong families (SF + WS) + (WF + SS), where strong family plus weak school does not produce as strong as a student as weak family and strong school does. Higher achievement will occur when both family and school networks are strong (SF + SS).

On the contrary, if a student lacks strong social networks in the family community or school, then achievement is lower regardless of income. The independent variables follow: (SF + WS) = lower effect, (WF + WS) = lowest effect, (WF + SS) = higher effect, (SF + SS) = highest

effect. The dependent variables are low and high achievement. For this research the definitions of strong schools and families are as follows:

Strong schools:

- Spend an adequate amount per student (Kozol 1991; 2005). The national average is \$6,835 (Toppo, 2002). In districts where the student body is predominantly of color, they spend \$908 less per student, of local and state funds (Eaton & McArdle, 2007; Washington Based Ed Trust, 2007),
- Contain administrators who are effective leaders, have experience, and are in districts that do not have a high turnover rate (Sherman, 2000; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).
- Have principals who:
 1. Recognize teaching and learning as the main business of a school,
 2. Communicate the school's mission clearly and consistently to staff members, parents, and students,
 3. Foster standards for teaching and learning that are high and attainable,
 4. Provide clear goals and monitors the progress of students toward meeting them,
 5. Spend time in classrooms and listening to teachers,
 6. Promote an atmosphere of trust and sharing,
 7. Build a good staff and make professional development a top concern,
 8. Do not tolerate bad teachers (Sherman, 2000),
- Do not have disparate access to civics by race/ethnicity (Eaton & McArdle, 2007),
- Do not have the majority of black and Hispanic students performing substandard. In 1998 (NAEP), the year the most recent data is available, 59% black and 55% Hispanic 12th graders scored below basic reading level (Kozol, 1991; 2005; Sole & McConnell, 2006; Kahne, 2005; US Dept of Ed, 1998),
- Are not taught by less qualified teachers: blacks in general and relevant to this analysis in New York City are taught by less qualified teachers (Holzman & Hyman, 2007; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007),
- Are adequately funded and equipped schools (Holzman & Hyman, 2007; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007),

- Have high teacher expectations for all students regardless of sex, gender, race or socioeconomic backgrounds (Kunjufu, 1986; Cotton, 1989; Majors, 1990; Bonner, 2001; Ellis, 2004; Ferguson, 2001; Donner, 2005; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007),
- Contain no metal detectors (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007),
- Offer rigorous courses (Bailey, 2003; Edwards, 1984; Holzman, 2004; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007),
- Offer school activities which promote positive relationships with faculty (Bonner, 2001; Harper, 2005; Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2006a; 2006b),
- Offer encouragement from guidance counselors (Harper, 2006),
- Do not practice the over classification and lower tracking of black males (Holzman, 2004),
- Engage stakeholders in community and school accountability (Harper, 2006; Cuyjet, 2007),
- Offer personal attention, where every high school is small enough or is divided up into small units to allow for greater teacher student interaction, safe environments that are free of weapons, violence, and drugs. Smaller schools also afford more family and community involvement, extra help for students who need it, make relevant connections between the real world and book learning, and convey graduation, test scores and other relevant information to students and the communities in a user friendly way (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).

Strong families:

According to a study in Kentucky that examined the relationship between parents and high school academic achievement, 69% of students believed that most high school students did not need parents to help them succeed. Because a large body of evidence and the information provided from the students surveyed in this study proves otherwise, there appears to be a discrepancy between students' perceptions and the research (Maton et. al, 1998; Moore, Madison- Colmore & Smith, 2003; Kentucky Conference for Community & Justice & Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence, 2005).

In March 2005, the Youth News Team administered a 43-question survey to students at five schools in Fayette County during class time. Of the 5,043 surveys returned, 3,883 or 77%

were completed thoroughly and used for analysis (Kentucky Conference for Community & Justice & Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence, 2005). The student body consisted of 12.7% black, 80.5% white (Kentucky Conference for Community & Justice & Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence, 2005). The findings from the study follow:

- Students with GPAs over 3.5 significantly more likely than peers with lower GPAs 2.0 have parents help them select classes,
- 69% have parents who frequently or sometimes help select courses compared to 40% with GPA below 2.0,
- 93% of those with GPA of 3.5 or higher have a comfortable place to study at home, also take more advanced math classes,
- Most students regardless of GPA do not enlist parents to help them with homework,
- Students with the highest GPAs sit down with parents at least three times a week for quality family time to talk to each other about life, school, the week,
- 92% of high achievers have parents who know where they are most of the time compared to 66% of those with 2.0 or below,
- High achievers (HA) have parents who attend school events (nearly twice as likely) 48% versus 25%,
- HA spend one hour less watching TV,
- HA females more likely to talk to parents about career plans (Kentucky Conference for Community and Justice & Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence, 2005).

Research notes that stronger students come from strong schools and strong families, reside in communities with low levels of violence, have parental and student advocacy, dedication, have commitment to family, and value education (Maton et. al, 1998; Moore, Madison- Colmore & Smith, 2003). Regrettably, not all students come from strong families, which can stem from emotional, educational, and economical factors. To counter the unfortunate start that students from emotionally disturbed or impoverished families have, strong schools can have an enormous impact

on educational success and attitudes and can thus teach social capital as Coleman's (1988) study suggested.

Chapter III

Data & Methodology

Introduction:

The data and methodology for my dissertation was taken directly from a larger study, the John Jay College, CUNY Bridging the Gap Study: JJ-07-047. The purpose of both studies, the larger and my study, was to investigate why there are fewer black males enrolled in and graduating from colleges and universities compared to other groups of students. Upon completing course requirements in the criminal justice program, I was alerted of the opportunity to become involved with the Black Male Initiative at John Jay College. My mentor, Ric Curtis, suggested that I speak with Douglas Thompkins, the principal investigator of the study, about my possible involvement with the research. After speaking with both Professors Thompkins and Curtis, I planned my involvement on the project.

Shortly thereafter, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program online required by CUNY before conducting any research. I completed the basic course for the graduate student learner group on June 19, 2007. After I met with the research team who were assistants to the larger project, I developed preliminary hypotheses as a guiding point. Then I began transcribing data and reading about the larger study. This set the stage for my involvement. Because of my background as an educator in my school district and my upbringing and experiences as a woman of color, working on this project was a great opportunity.

As a social studies teacher for eight years, I see first hand the devastating effects of the achievement gap where children of color, particularly black males lag behind. I have spent time discussing the former with my colleagues both formally and informally, e.g. during staff development, professional conferences, and in the teacher workspace. Some teachers express a

genuine concern for underachieving students, while others seem scornful. Remarks about students' levels and work ethic vary. Some including myself contend students do not put forth their full potential, but genuinely want to assist them in efforts to enhance their work ethic.

Although not all children of color do poorer in school than other groups of students, research shows a disproportionate number of black males are suspended and classified for special education services (Holzman, 2004). This study uncovered some of the reasons as to why this is happening, providing insights, which could inform the development of programs, designed to address the needs of black male students in New York City high schools, at John Jay, and other City University of New York (CUNY) colleges (see tables 1 & 2). This research recognized the importance of gathering information from the at risk population themselves to provide insight on methods to increase educational achievement. Further, this chapter describes my role on this project as a social scientist and educator.

Acknowledging the nation's historical racialized legal context, this study examined the possibility that racialized legal history and social reproduction influences the target group's attitudes about education and the legal system, which in turn affects behavior. This study like the larger study was concerned with factors that influence educational attitudes of black males. The research assessed the general attitudes of education held by the target group and how that general image may have differed from that of its counter-part. This research sought to determine to what extent attitudes about institutions such as school and the legal system were related to compliance with the law and rules in the general educational setting.

Data Analysis:

Multiple means of data collection were used, e.g. survey, interviews, focus groups, field notes, official data, and peer debriefing with the research team (see appendix 8 for regents' scores, statistics on schools). Triangulation of data and methods, which includes collaboration with a research team at John Jay College discussed below, was used to limit researcher subjectivity and to increase validity. The focus group reliability was tested with the comparison of focus group responses from the various schools. For instance, students from all schools discussed the importance of seeing mentors and teachers who resemble them. Students also mention positive school culture and high teacher expectation as imperative to the academic setting. Survey and focus groups were used to enhance the research and to limit a sole reliance on subjective data. Primary data is included in the findings. Triangulation, which includes the use of the archival data from black males, black females, interviews and focus groups from staff and faculty, both white and black, were employed to provide an in depth analysis.

Field notes already collected from the larger study were used as well as quantitative data from the survey instrument completed by participants, national policy reports, and New York City Department of Education. Focus group findings were transcribed in a timely manner with the assistance of Professor Thompkins, the principal investigator on the larger BMI initiative at John Jay College, and Andre Spynda, my research partner who also used data from the larger study to complete his thesis, a partial requirement for a Master of Arts in Criminal Justice.

Paired interviewing, tape recording, peer debriefing, and negative checking was used to ensure accuracy of data. Missing information was discarded and noted. A GPA conversion chart provided by www.princetonreview.com was used for students who provided percentage grades. Some students used percentage grades instead of letter grades. Cross-tabulations of those who

supplied information showed a correlation between increased parental education and higher GPAs. Andre and I coded the data, the research team, which included Douglas Thompkins and two graduate students enrolled in the master's program at John Jay College assisted in analyzing the data, and providing themes that were explored within the data (see appendix 7). Primarily, Andre and I transcribed and coded the data to identify themes. Afterwards, Andre and I discussed the themes we both found individually within the data. We used systematic coding for content analysis and reviewed field notes to record patterns and themes that occurred during the focus groups. We constructed tables using Microsoft Word to display the lists of schools, activities within the school, and recurrent themes. Microsoft Excel was used to display graduation rates, attendance rates, and other statistics from New York City Department of Education, Inside Schools, Great Schools, and School Digger, independent school evaluators. Using SPSS, we displayed descriptive statistics from the social demographic survey to complete cross-tabulations of students' GPA, parents' education, and ethnicity. Percentages were calculated using SPSS descriptive information to find any correlations with school ranking and self-reported grade point averages and ethnic origin. In order to avoid personal biases, Andre, who is a white male, and I both transcribed and coded the data together. Our diverse racial backgrounds and experiences served to enrich the data and counteract any biases.

Most times the themes found were similar, but if one of us listed a theme the other did not note, we both went back to the transcription and mutually agreed if the theme should or should not be included. He and I made the final list of themes together after the focus groups and transcriptions were completed. The focus groups were conducted during school and at the school (except for one (Atlantic) conducted at John Jay), which is part of the normal school day to reduce ecological threats to validity. The formal framework of social reproduction and legal socialization

theory guided my research, but techniques to ground theory from the data were also employed to limit the possibilities of oversight and researcher bias. Employing triangulation of data and methods were used to compensate for bias.

Andre and I developed an ethnographic summary through repeatedly reviewing the transcripts for underlying information. He and I used quotations illustrated of key points along with narratives to explain the themes. Still, themes identified in this analysis included two types: predetermined and emergent themes. We employed both to compensate for bias. For instance, one emergent theme identified and included in this study was negative risky behavior. Even though, the research did not anticipate learning of cut parties in which students engaged, its inclusion was warranted. It is also recommended that cut parties be explored further in future studies.

Observing the educational scene from a variety of perspectives:

Nonetheless, my over 10 years experience as an educator allowed me to observe the inner working of the school community through a series of unique vantage points that assists me in analyzing the multi-faceted data for this study. Thus, for example, after beginning work as an educator in New York State, I learned about important actors in the school setting and the importance school culture has on the educational experiences of the learner. Below several of my experiences, which helped inform my knowledge of the educational setting are briefly described:

- For two years, I worked as a teacher/tutor at Huntington Learning Center where I received training on how to help students improve self-esteem and study skills. While working here, I saw the disparities between the types of programs offered to affluent students compared to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds³.
- For one year, I provided subject and SAT/ACT Exam preparation tutoring to students who resided in suburbia while employed by Score!Prep a division of Kaplan. Again, the disparities between those who could afford the tutoring and

³ With the No Child Left Behind Act, some centers are able to offer free tutoring to students from schools listed as “program improvement” under the NCLB law. Source: Jacobson, L. (2005). Leveling the playing field: Huntington Learning Center. *Education Week*, 25, 28.

those who could not were apparent. The intersection between race and class was clearly visible. The twenty plus students who could afford this were all Caucasian except for the one mixed race Chinese and Caucasian student, and the occasional basketball player whom the school paid for with hopes of later rewards (e.g. acknowledgment of the school's sports program).

- For eight years, I have worked at a large, ethnically diverse comprehensive high school as a social studies teacher. In this capacity, the intersection between race and class became even more apparent. When I first began at the school, the students of color were largely tracked in lower classes. For example, the Global Studies Regents Prep course, a lower level course, was largely black and Hispanic compared to the Regents course, which was largely white. After a couple of years, the designation of Regents Prep and Regents was banned with the hopes to end the form of labeling and the course was offered as Global Regents only. This change spurred the increased enrollment of whites in World History Advanced Placement, whose grades did not reflect the placement. Students had learned that the courses were weighted substantially where a C in AP or honors equated to a B. Working in this setting allows me to develop an insider's view of the educational scene.

These positions represent the vantage points that have informed my insider's knowledge of the school setting. Being an educator, affords me a complex understanding of how the educational system works by taking advantage of the greater access to information and resources denied to most researchers not employed by the school district.

Research design:

This qualitative study relies on my 10 years experience as an educator in New York State to triangulate data from a variety of sources in order to provide insight into the educational experiences of the black male students and to understand how social reproduction happens in schools. All of the sources listed below are used to inform the focus group and descriptive data collected from the students and the schools. The most crucial data in this regard are included as follows:

- Qualitative interviews with 155 students at seven schools in New York City
- Quantitative data collected from 151 participants, 101 males and 50 females (females were included in only two of the schools) at six of the seven schools.

- Interviews conducted with 23 faculty, administration, and staff about the students that reside in their high schools.
- Official documents from the state archives concerning the New York City Department of Education data from 2004-2007 (see appendix 8).
- Statistical resources from Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Personal observation, field notes, of five schools by the principal investigator of the larger BMI study.
- Personal observation of the educational setting.

The following tables show the types of schools and data included in the study:

Table 1: List of Schools

School Name	Type of School
North Academy	Empowerment (Public)
Darwin Academy	Empowerment (Public)
Southern High	Empowerment (closing)**
MARSHALL High	Empowerment (90% male)
Basin High	Public
Wake Academy High	Public (All Males)
Plain Academy	Alternative
Central High	Alternative
Hudson High	Transition (Alternative)
Atlantic Academy	Alternative
Cascade High School*	Private (All males)
Midway High	Vocational

Table 2: Types of Data

Types of Data Personal Observation of Principal Investigator of the larger BMI study (Field Notes only) 5 schools	Basin High School		
	Darwin Academy		
	Wake Academy High School		
	Midway High		
	Southern High		
Focus Groups: 155 student participants, quantitative data on 151 ⁴ student participants, 23 faculty participants; 50 females *Field Notes included along w/ focus group	Cascade High School*	5 focus groups	4 groups (18 males: 13 African Americans, 2 Caribbean, 1 Latin, 2 Others (5 Seniors, 5 Juniors, 4 Sophomores, 4 Freshman); and 1 mixed 5 faculty group
	Plain*	4 focus groups	18 students (8 males, 10 females: 11 African Americans, 2 Caribbean, 1 Latino, 1 Other, 3 Missing: (6 faculty mixed gender)
	North Academy *	5 focus groups	86 students (, 46 males, 40 Female): 45 African Americans, 28 Caribbean non-Latino, 8 Latino, 5 Other); 2 African American male faculty
	MARSHALL High	2 focus groups	10 male students (5 Freshmen, 5 Juniors,); 4 African American, 2 Caribbean, 3 Latin, 1 Other)
	Central*	2 focus groups	5 male students: 5 mixed grades: (4 African American, 1 Latino); 5 faculty mixed gender and race
	Hudson (an ATI; no quantitative data collected)	2 focus groups	6 male students (mixed grades): 4 Faculty (mixed gender and race)
	Atlantic Academy*	1 focus groups	12 male students: (4 African Americans, 1 Caribbean, 6 Latino, 1 Other); 1 faculty
	7 Schools	21 focus groups	155 students; 23 faculty

⁴ Two students did not identify school.

Participant observation:

As mentioned previously, I began working in the field of education ten years ago. As an educator and student, I have seen first hand how social reproduction can happen in schools. I also understand that other variables contribute to a student's educational experiences, e.g. teacher expectation, gatekeeping, skill level, and family involvement or lack thereof. In American society, a myth in meritocracy persists, removing any blame from institutions and placing them solely on the individual or learner. Although agency does exist and affects one's outcome in life, many other factors attribute to an individual's success. Schools that are under-funded and equipped with those teaching out of their certification area, are a disservice to the nation's most at risk students and attribute to their plight, a fact functionalists who place all the weight on agency negate.

While working at a large, diverse comprehensive high school, I learned about the educational scene from an insider's view. As an educator, I understand that teaching is only one facet of a teaching-learning process, a process which success centers upon effective communication. Communication is undermined when students sense that they are of little importance to their teacher or the school. What teachers do in the classroom is important because the people who come there to learn are important. This attitude toward students is expressed a number of ways, including: the careful design of a course that meets the diverse needs of students, the devotion of energy to preparation for class, the clear expression of one's involvement in teaching, the respectful treatment of students in the give and take of classroom interaction, and the notion of classroom management. Teacher expectation is equally important and is exhibited in the attitude of the teachers. Unfortunately, some students usually tracked in lower level courses and darker skin, share stories of teachers who have lower expectations for them.

As an educator, I understand how stressful it can be to have what appear to be non-responsive bodies in the class, especially when great care and planning occurred. Early in my teaching career, it was discovered that everyone will not achieve As and Bs, but also evident as an educator, was my obligation to instruct all students fairly and adequately. I also refrained from forming preconceived opinions about students based on a previous teacher's experience with a student. Every year, several students do not do well in other teachers' classes but attain As, Bs or Cs in my class. The former is not known until the student is in the house office receiving reprimands from an administrator.

Similarly to some of the students who have negative experiences with teachers, my first year teaching was quite a challenge, not the notion of teaching itself but the people inside the building made it very difficult for a new teacher to survive, luckily the students kept me afloat. My first year having my own classroom was a wonderful experience. I developed excellent relationships with my students and some of my colleagues. I also learned that some of the older, traditional teachers and faculty were not pleased to see my young, brown face. I could tell from the stares and rumors of me doing drugs that often got back to me. Although I had my teaching credentials: I began teaching with my Master of Arts in Teaching, something that some teachers did not have, that did not seem to matter. Usually, a master's degree is required within five years of teaching. Furthermore, all my evaluations from the administrators went well. Still my colleagues found a way to make my life miserable. By winter of my first year teaching, I found myself in the assistant principal's office along with a union representative and the social studies chair. The reason I soon came to find out involved me opening a learning center in my hometown of Danbury, CT, an entirely different city and state.

Upon opening the center, a newspaper article regarding the opening day of the center appeared on the cover of the local section. The former president of the teacher's union lived in New Fairfield and read the paper. He gave the article to some administrators, a quite ironic thing to do considering the union is supposed to protect workers. The paper mistakenly stated the learning center opened its doors between 3:00-3:30 pm. In reality, the center opened between 3:15- 3:30 allowing the allotted time of 30-35 minutes to drive from Westchester to Connecticut. Opening the center at 3 pm was not possible because work did not end until 2:35 pm.

Nonetheless, the story in the paper raised concerns with me leaving work early. In addition to teaching at the center, I was also beginning an exam preparation course at the high school and had submitted copies to be made for an exam prep session offered at the high school. To my surprise, one of the members of the social studies department took the copies from the copy room prior to completion to the social studies chair. When asked about why I had submitted several documents to the copy room, I reminded them that I was also teaching an SAT course in the after school program. No apologies were received, but the copies were given back.

This being said, the harsh reception I received my first couple of years should not surprise others when complaints of mistreatment among students surface. The following discussion with a security guard named Jim confirmed the maltreatment students of color sometimes receive from white teachers. Jim told me during lunch one day, a teacher while walking down the hall bumped into a Hispanic male student. Although it may have been on accident, according to Jim, the teacher then said to the student, "Bump me again and I'll pour my hot coffee on you." Jim said that both he and the student were shocked by the teacher's comments. Jim reported that the student had been talking to his friends and had not bumped the teacher. The student looked at the white male teacher and said, "Whatever, I didn't bump you."

Afterwards, Jim prompted by what he had just witnessed, approached an administrator to inform him of the event. The administrator's response was callous according to Jim. He said the administrator told him that the teacher had threatened to go the union and claimed that Jim had threatened his safety. Receiving this news, Jim told the administrator what he witnessed again and that he hadn't threatened anyone. The administrator told him, "You didn't see anything, it was noisy at lunch." Jim said, "Yes, I did," and repeated what he witnessed. Again, the administrator said, "You didn't see anything. It was noisy during lunch." Jim became irritated as he caught on to the cue. Jim told me afterwards that he just walked away in dismay. Countless other incidents, according to the Jim and other security guards continue. Students aren't the only ones to encounter disrespectful treatment, but inconsistent reprimands occur to teachers of color. For example two tenured teachers, one white and the other Hispanic, had gone for a run at the end of the school year during their break time, and when both returned to the school, the Hispanic teacher received an email and was questioned about his whereabouts and why he had gone running. After being requested to the office by the principal, he proceeded and once there looked around. He saw the other teacher was not present, and left the office. Upon questioning the other teacher, the Hispanic teacher learned that he was the only one summoned to the office.

Disrespectful encounters continue between white administrators and teachers of color and white administrators and white teachers with students of color. Talking with security guards at the school provides me with privileged information regarding race disparities in suspension, both in school and out. Students of color are suspended at higher rates than white students. According to Jim, when Caucasian students are caught with drugs, the response entails no punishment because their parents may be on the Board of Education, employed by the district, or are lawyers.

Again, to draw a parallel to the race inequalities that exist in institutions, it took me three full teaching years before I could teach a law elective, even though I enrolled in a criminal justice doctoral program beginning my third year, and each year there has been a struggle to achieve equitable teaching loads. On the other hand, white teachers in my department, who are not in a doctoral program, begin their first year teaching law electives. If I can be treated this way as an educated adult, imagine how the students are treated.

The former experiences in the school system and my ten years as an educator, inform my participant observation on this project even though I did not directly conduct the focus groups. The other form of participant observation included in this study is the one of the principal investigator, on the larger project and my research partner. He along with several research assistants conducted all the focus groups. They took meticulous field notes that are included in this analysis. My research partner, Andre accompanied Dr. Douglas Thompkins to most of the research sites. He debriefed me on the conditions of the schools. Andre and I interviewed Douglas Thompkins about his visit to five schools, in which Dr. Thompkins discussed his experiences as a social scientist and how his training as a social scientist informed his critique of the research sites.

Qualitative interviews:

The research instrument developed for qualitative interviews with the students had two parts. Part one of the instrument was a questionnaire consisting of both closed and open-ended questions seeking demographic information about each respondent, as well as information about their experiences in school, in the community and their family life (see appendices 1 &2). Part two was a qualitative interview guide that focused on students' perceptions about education and their attitudes toward the educational setting (see appendix 3). The interview guide allowed detailed information to be elicited about school such as school culture, teacher expectation, courses and programs offered.

The interview guide was developed to arrive at a deeper understanding of their educational experiences, family background, specialized programs offered in school. The interview guide gathered social demographic information from the students, while the focus group elicited responses about student attitudes, experiences, and perceptions about education and the presence of black men in the college and university setting. The students' responses followed many of the major themes that are developed in the literature such as:

- Media's influence on the community, learned negative behaviors (McShepard, et. al., 2007),
- Cultural differences, involuntary between voluntary immigrants, acting white theory and or defying the oppositional other (Ogbu, 2003; Ferguson, 2002),
- Teacher expectation: apathetic teachers versus empowering teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Donner, 2005; Ellis, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Gibson, 2002; Bonner, 2001; Ferguson, 2001; Majors, 1990; Cotton, 1989; Kunjufu, 1986)
- School culture and attitude (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007; Harper, 2006; Cuyjet, 2007)
- Socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity (Willis, 1977; Leicht, et. al., 2007)
- Effects gatekeeping and over-classification as special education students have on educational experiences of black males (Civil Rights Project Harvard University, 2008; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Losen, 2002a; 2002b).

Sources of participants and selection criteria:

The research participants for this study derived from the Bridging the Gap study. Participants for the Bridging the Gap study were recruited from New York City high schools. Members of the research team visited 12 different high schools, conducted participant observations and informal focus groups with students, faculty, and staff at seven of the 12 schools, and collected solely field notes from five schools. One-hundred and five black males and 50 black female

students attending different types of high schools in the New York City were selected for focus group interviews.

A purposeful sample of black males attending New York City high schools was developed using official school records in partnership with administrators at each high school. Those selected to participate in the focus group interview filled out an interview instrument identifying social demographics. The following six areas were mined for information: high school experience, family experience, school community experience, race relations, people admired. High schools were selected based on the racial composition of the student body, high school location, and areas of education specialization.

Twenty-one focus groups as well as informal discussions with students, faculty, and administration were conducted. The research team sampled seven schools from the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. A broad spectrum of schools from the very best to the very worst were included. The study compares high achieving and low achieving schools across four types of schools: alternative, empowerment, private, and public to evaluate which schools produce successful versus unsuccessful black males. At least two of each type of school were selected to allow for an in depth analysis.

Procedures:

This study used archival data from the Bridging the Gap study. The larger study distributed the focus group interview instrument, obtained parental consent and youth assent forms, and explained the purposed of the research to the parents and student respondents prior to the start of the interview. Focus group interviews were conducted at seven New York City high schools (see appendices 2 & 3 for high school focus group interview instrument). The research team requested written permission from an official of the high schools authorizing the research team to conduct

focus group interviews of students attending their institution. The purpose of the research and the rights of participants were explained to the parents of the potential student respondents and to the students themselves prior to the start of the interview (see appendix 4 for Parental Consent Form, appendix 5 for Youth Assent Form, & appendix 6 for Informed Consent Form). The signature of the parent was obtained by sending the Parental Consent Form home by any student who showed an interest in participating in the study. If the student returned the form with the parent's signature, that student was included in the population of potential respondents. The questions asked of the students focused on their high school experience, whether they planned to go to college and whether they felt they had been prepared to attend college, and about their community. High school students participating in the focus group interviews were paid \$10.00.

Potential harm or benefit:

There was no known potential harm associated with the Bridging the Gap study and thus none is associated with this study other than that which the respondents would face on a daily bases living a normal life. The potential benefits of both include understanding and informing the general debate within CUNY and the larger society about why black males are not attending colleges and universities in numbers compared to other groups of students. The information gained from this research will foster the development of programs and initiatives designed to respond to the black male student population attending CUNY colleges, and to facilitate the creation of effective recruitment strategies targeting black males.

Confidentiality:

All identifying characteristics of the participants in the study were removed and a coding system was used to protect the identity of the participants. Pseudonyms were provided to each participant to replace the real name of each person part of a focus group, individual interview, and

school. Audio tapes and demographic data were coded with a numbering system. Official school records containing the identifying characteristics of potential respondents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of the principal investigator, to which only the principal investigator will have access. All audio tapes and transcripts of the participants will be kept in separate locked file cabinets in the office of the principal investigator to which only the principal investigator will have access. As soon as the research participants have been identified the list used to recruit the participants will be destroyed. The tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and coded, and the transcripts will be destroyed within a week after the principal investigator approves the final draft of the research report.

Tying it all together:

The various sources of data collected for this study allow for the effective triangulation of data in ways that assist in examining the educational experiences of black males in New York City high schools and determining the impact race, class, and gatekeeping have on black male students. By examining the policies and practices of education in the nation and New York City, the variety of data in this study assist in illuminating issues with race, class, and education. The firsthand observations are supplemented by interviews, focus groups with students, black males and females, and faculty and staff of New York City high schools.

Supplementation continues with media reports, conversations with social scientists, official data from New York Department City Department of Education and the Bureau of Justice Statistics, educational sources such as the Alliance of Excellent Education and the College Board (see appendix 8). Sources from two conferences on the plight of black males attended at Chelsea Piers in New York City in July of 2007 and 2008, which included speakers Roland Fryer, Pedro

Noguera, and Charles Rangel and data from the Charles Hamilton Houston, Institute for Race & Justice at Harvard Law School support the data and field observations.

The educational experiences of black males within New York City high schools appear to be similar to experiences of other black males in the nation. This research provides an in-depth look at the educational experiences of Black males, the effect teacher expectation and school culture has on the black male. The specific purpose of this study is to investigate black males' attitudes toward and perceptions of education. More importantly, the purpose of this study is to investigate how social reproduction happens in schools and how the intersection of class and race affects black males.

Chapter IV

Voices of Black Males in the School Environment

This research sought to evaluate how black males experienced the educational setting. In doing this, the study reports that not all black males experienced the educational setting the same. Some students were more successful in school than others, where the school setting, culture, and attitude of the school significantly impacted the educational experience. Students who attended empowerment schools who had more teachers and role models of African descent, experienced school quite differently than students who attended traditional public schools in New York City. Students who attended private, catholic and academy schools reported their experiences to be better than former traditional schools.

Research and the focus group findings show students perform better in career academies that infuse supportive, personalized learning, and curricula connected to the academic and the professional work environment related to schools. Academies also have targeted practical learning and college entrance requirements (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Students who attended career academy and empowerment schools in New York City reported their learning environments to be more positive than traditional public high schools. The notion of students reporting more positive experiences support the use of academy schools. According to Kemple and Snipes (2000), academy schools have been in existence for over 30 years and are in over 1,500 schools.

Research findings from their report, which focused on 1,700 students who applied to one of nine academies, looked at how the career academy approach affected students academically and found their approach decreased drop out rates, especially among the at risk population (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). The study focused on students who entered the eighth to ninth grade year and followed them until their intended scheduled senior year. Findings also report that career

academies increased participation in career awareness and the interpersonal support between teachers and peers. Sites that did not increase the interpersonal support between peers and teachers decreased student engagement and increased the drop out rate (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Student achievement and engagement were hinged upon positive teacher-student interaction and possibly positive peer interactions.

Many of the students who attended the following empowerment and academy school describe why they chose to attend their school. The students explain that school culture and teacher expectation are very important to their learning. In their descriptions, the students described their former schools as plagued with apathetic teachers and a non-learning environment. Students describe their former and current learning environment, school culture, motivational forces and the various themes identified from the focus group findings (see appendix 7). The findings are not listed by order of school, rather order of themes. Throughout this chapter, various schools can be listed following one theme. In this case, the school will be identified preceding the students' comments.

School culture / attitude (teacher expectation)

Students attending North Academy High School show the third greatest graduation rate among the schools at 87.1%. This comprehensive school include grades 9-12, class size⁵ ranges from 15-30 students, enrollment 1013, and a student population of 2% whites, 83% blacks, 12% Hispanics, and 3% Asians. There is an abundant of activities offered as well as community support. Attending this type of school seems to afford the students a sense of pride and an increased sense of achievement. Teachers indicated that many students attended the Extended Day

⁵ The class size refers to the number of full-time teacher equivalent (FTE), thus a lower number does not mean a smaller class size. The numbers are based on full-time teacher and part time teachers are not included. The student to teacher ratio could be very high if there is an abundance of part-time teachers employed (NCES).

Program voluntarily and did not want to leave. One black female teacher, in particular, challenged the students to think critically. When students didn't understand a concept or question, she broke it down to a level that made them understand and took the time to make sure each student understood. For example, while teaching economics, she would relate concepts such as supply and demand to their personal lives. By using examples such as the cost of Jordan sneakers, the Playstation 3, or the Nintendo Wii, she would explain that the cost of the items rose due to demand. By doing this, the learning became relevant to the students' experiences.

Students attributed their positive attitudes about academics to their school environment. Some of the students believed the criminalization of many New York City schools were detrimental to learning and compared their experiences in traditional New York City high schools to their empowerment school. The following exchange between the interviewer and the respondents, which include a mix of levels and gender, describe the students' thoughts on their school:

Interviewer: Why are you here? What drove you to come to school here?

John: I chose this because it was similar to a junior high school summer program I attended. Academics.

Jim: I plan to go to college. I am a senior,

Interviewer: Have you begun the process?

Jim: Yes, I will major in computer engineering.

Interviewer speaking to John: Why are you here?

John: I wanted to go, but wasn't accepted at first because my grades weren't good enough. Then I transferred from another school. This environment is different- less aggressive, less peer pressure. My previous school had lots of police and metal detectors. There are two police officers here compared to ten at my other school. I want to go to Morgan State, but I'm not sure of what to study yet.

School environment seemed to be a huge factor on their educational experiences. Students appreciated smaller classes as well as smaller rooms. Previous research found larger educational settings adversely impacted the learner (Holzman, 2006). A policy report written on the criminalization of schools in New York City confirms the following student's, Tim's, thoughts (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007). Tim agreed that an environment without a host of police officers and metal detectors produces a better student:

Tim: This is a good academic school and environment. There are not a bunch of metal detectors. The people here push you forward; teachers are here to help you.

Ron added that teacher expectation and smaller class sizes are very beneficial to the learner. His comments support the notion that students in smaller schools perform better than those in larger schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Holzman, 2006):

Ron: Like more one on one, they (teachers) pay attention to what you say.

Interviewer: Is the attitude that this school is the best?

Tim: Yes, sort of. Has a great graduation rate. I've been accepted to a couple of different schools (discussing being accepted to multiple high schools). I want to major in computer science and minor in social work.

The following student discussed the importance of being around people like themselves, African American teachers, role models, and students who are doing well:

Ron: I like this school better, more African Americans and people of color.

Considering the positive responses of most students who attended North Academy, it is worthy to note that one student contended that she didn't want to attend the school at first for fear that it had a violent environment like the other city schools:

Lisa: I did not want to go to here at first; many told me that I would get beat up because I am small. I realized that it was a lie. Teachers cared if you were in top ten in old school, gave you special treatment- would talk to you more, called on you more. Old school said you (students who were disengaged) just wouldn't make it.

Two black teachers, Wanda and Tina, at North Academy, interviewed separately, confirmed the students' negative experiences in traditional New York City high schools as they explained their high school experiences. Wanda explained how one white female teacher in particular was known for failing students but continued to teach in the school. According to both teachers, it is not known if the teacher received reprimanding, but she taught at the same school for over 20 years. The following describes the teachers' high school encounters with their former white teacher:

Wanda Spelling: Well with me, I had just had her for homeroom the year before. And she said that she was going to fail me when she had me in class next year. She had failed numerous African-American students for the simple fact that she didn't like them. But she would pass all the white kids just for doing nothing. She was just a known teacher to fail African-Americans.

Tina Smith: They (the school administrators) were fully aware that the majority of students that failed in her class were black, but I guess she was tenured. She was there forever. She was just one of those teachers that you were going to have to go through.

The following student describes why he chose to attend Cascade, and similarly to the students who attended North Academy, the larger empowerment school, agrees that the environment of traditional public schools did not encourage his learning. Ricky attends an all male parochial school in New York City with an enrollment of 400 students and population of 77% black, 13% Hispanic, and 10% unspecified students. This school had the best graduation rates among the schools included in the study.

Because private school data is not readily available to the public, the statistics reported come from the school administrator, where Cascade boasts a 100% graduation and 100% college attendance rates. The administrator reported that the school follows the students to college and the college graduation rate is 85%. Although there are no official statistics to confirm the results, this school is well known for producing academically successful black males. In describing the school attended before Cascade, Ricky, a freshman, in a focus group of four ninth graders said:

Ricky: The work was easy and I didn't like it or its location. A lot of people would get into trouble; it was hard to focus 'cuz the classes would get real noisy.

Interviewer: So, what's an example of getting into trouble?

Ricky: You got people yelling and cursing and throwing stuff around the room and stuff. The class was all messy.

His description of his former school implies that the students were in control of the school and not the teachers.

Positive school culture: High achieving school

Freshmen at Cascade High School appreciated the positive school culture that their private school environment afforded them. Students credited the smaller school for increasing better teacher student relationships. Students also benefited from positive peer influences.

Luis: ...they teach us responsibility and they teach us everything that goes under responsibility like handling our business, taking care of our grades and that would be everything a college student would probably need to do.

Interviewer: Do you think you're getting something in here that is different than you would have got if you went to a different high school or another high school?

Luis: As in more attention and more than just a teacher student relationship, as if a friendship with your teachers and your peers so that you can, not only can you have help from a tutor somewhere, you can have help here with your teachers, or an older student. (Cascade Freshman)

Tom agrees: There is more discipline here than I would get in another high school and it's more advanced...

Institutionalization of NYC schools

The increased presence of security guards, police officers, and metal detectors in the school environment of predominantly minority schools negatively influences the learning experience. A recent report evaluates the increasing criminalization of the school environment. This environment seems to be preparing students for prison, increasing the likelihood of the school to prison pipeline (Mukherjee & Fellow, 2007). Students who attended MARSHALL High, an empowerment specialty school with grades 9-12, a class size of 26, enrollment of 308 and population of 1%

whites, 80% blacks, and 17% Hispanics and 90% male describe how the institutionalization of schools impact the learning environment. The school is too new to report any graduation and regents' statistics. Students are conflicted on the presence of metal detectors, but agree that a host of metal detectors are not conducive to the school environment. The following student, in a focus group of five male juniors at MARSHALL High, describes his school environment:

Dayvon: When you all walk in the front door, downstairs, you have a metal detector and a lot of security.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel about your school environment?

Dayvon: That it's bad if we need metal detectors to come to school.

Interviewer: When you say bad, what do you mean?

Dayvon: We're not criminals, why would you need metal detectors to come to school but then you got to think about it, it's actually keeping us safe because JM (his old school) back in the day was horrible and people were coming in here with knives and guns and now that's not happening because of the scanners and metal detectors, everything has gotten better, which is actually a good thing. You can't always look at it as a bad thing.

Interviewer: So is it a good thing?

Dayvon: It's a good thing because it keeps us safe.

Interviewer: So...?

Dayvon: ...but then again some people know how to get that stuff in here anyway.

Lisa in a mixed focus group at North Academy agrees with Dayvon about the use of metal detectors in schools. According to Lisa, she contemplated dropping out of her former traditional high school because of the prison like environment:

Lisa: I leaned towards it (dropping out) my 9th grade year, all the metal detectors didn't feel comfortable, hated going there, the environment, rather stay in my own community. Building was ugly, like cages, looked like jail. Here everyone like a family, know everyone, interact with people, in constant contact with each other.

Dayvon in describing how the metal detectors make him feel, he also acknowledges that they are sometimes helpful. His analysis seems conflicting, but he notes that the metal detectors seem to dehumanize him. Students smuggle paraphernalia and weapons in schools where there are no metal detectors. In the comprehensive high school with no metal detectors, approximately 15 security guards and at least one school resource officer during the day, where I teach, students have brought drugs and knives to school. Still yet, this school would never dream of putting metal detectors for fear of public backlash. School personnel generally would not place a host of metal detectors in a district dominated by wealth and white parents.

In one incident at my high school, a school administrator found haze in a white male student's book bag. When the appropriate action of suspension was suggested, the student's parents called and said no such thing would happen. A black male who was caught with drugs, did not encounter the same response. The black male who was a traditionally good student, academically and behaviorally, was arrested in school and taken out with handcuffs during the school day. All his senior privileges including attending prom were removed. This is not to say that he didn't deserve punishment, but punishment should be consistent for all races and classes.

Nevertheless, this same divide exists in many institutions in American society including our criminal justice system. Race and class disparities exist with drug offenders and misdemeanor and felony offenders, where a majority of inmates in New York State and the nation are incarcerated for drugs. Forty-three point nine-one percent of inmates in the nation are African American and 18.26% are Hispanic (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Black and Hispanic, make up the majority of inmates although blacks only make up 12.32% of the population and Hispanics 12.55% (U.S. Census 2000 records. See figures 1 and 2:

United States Population By Race

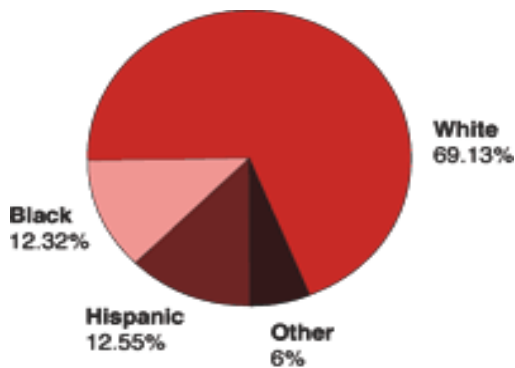


Figure 1
Source: U.S. Census, 2000. White and black excludes Hispanics.

State and Fed Inmates By Race

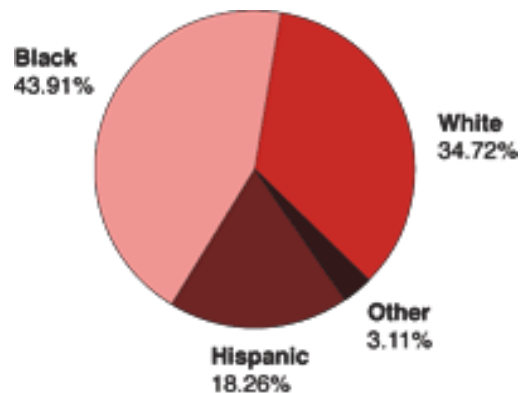


Figure 2
Source: Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2002," April 6, 2003. White and black excludes Hispanics. Human Rights Watch Report, 2003.

Appearance

Another student in the same focus group as Dayvon discussed how attending the specialty school made him feel. According to Vaughn, wearing the t-shirt with the school's name on it made people treat him differently, perhaps better.

Interviewer: When you leave school, you go home, people see you with your MARSHALL High school shirt on, do you take that shirt off when you leave here?

Vaughn: No. I keep it on.

Interviewer: So, how do people respond to you on the train? You get a lot of attention, from whom?

Vaughn: Pedestrians and everything.

Interviewer: Do they look at you and give you respect?

Vaughn: Yes they do.

Interviewer: Do people treat you differently when you have that shirt on compared to when you have something else on?

Vaughn: Yes.

Interviewer: Give me an example of how they treat you differently.

Vaughn: Sometimes in the train station, you have got no fare no nothing, the guy he won't let you in, like if you're all dressed down baggy and everything but if you've got like a shirt that says MARSHALL High and he's gonna let you go, he's like go ahead, you know. My metrocard didn't have no money on it and I was coming from school and then he saw me. And he saw I didn't have no money. He was like, "Oh, you can just go through." And he buzzed the door.

Interviewer: 'Cause he saw MARSHALL High?

Vaughn: Yeah

School culture / safety (from students)

Students at all of the schools believed that a school with fair rules and staff who genuinely care about students assist in feelings of safety. Students who attended Atlantic Academy, an alternative school that admits students 16 or older discuss their experiences with school security. Atlantic Academy is an intake multi-site transfer school that includes family group, a homeroom, which allows for a more therapeutic environment. Students report that they can tell their teachers anything. Family group has a leader who is self-appointed and held accountable for the students. A female principal serves as the matriarch for the school, who generally aids students to perform better, according to Dr. Thompkins, the lead investigator on the larger project. The various sites are throughout Manhattan, some have a dress code and others don't.

Students attending Atlantic seemed to benefit from the smaller more communal environment. Their responses supported that notion that smaller class environments, less overcrowding, can build school pride and self-esteem. The students explained that attending Atlantic, as opposed to larger schools with uncaring teachers, allowed for their educational reengagement. Students reported their learning was enhanced by better student-teacher relationships and a variety of pedagogical techniques. Students and teachers are on a first name basis and teaching strategies include direct, student and cooperative instruction. Upon observing Atlantic, the school appeared to be an empowering environment without much conflict. Students,

who were older, average 16-17 years of age, seemed more serious about their learning especially following several false starts at traditionally larger institutions.

Atlantic Academy's graduate rate was 16.6%, the second lowest rate after Plain Academy (discussed later). The school is 39% black, 54% Hispanic, 4% white, 2% Asian Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian. Attendance rates were a low 66%. Many of the students who attended this school had not done well in traditional settings, but appreciated the family-therapeutic environment. The focus group consisted of 12 black male students and one black male faculty member who attended Atlantic as a youth. The following interaction highlights the students' perceptions on school safety:

Interviewer: Inside and outside of your school, what is it like?

Steve: I feel safe in school cuz there are certain rules and restrictions. We learn how to live with each other.

Rob: I feel safe in my neighborhood (in school). The director will talk to you and speak to you if there is an issue. She wants everyone to stay in school.

George: (staff) One big word we use at Atlantic is community. A prime example of holding everyone accountable, if something is going around, we address them.

Steve: We have an advisor with family group (homeroom). A couple times a week in the morning, we discuss problems in and out of school. They try to help you with your problems.

Joe: I am attached to my school deeply. I was going through a hard time, I was 16. People were mad nice. My old teacher would give advice. I am attached to my school; I was going to get kicked out because I violated school policy. I said that I wouldn't go to any other school. I didn't get a hair cut, didn't really come out and started eating less. They (the school) let me come back; I was happy.

Rob: Before Atlantic, I had no plans to go to college. They really cared about, cared if you really passed. It made me like school much better.

Students in the focus group described many of their former schools as environments that were counterproductive to learning. There were serious safety concerns in the schools attended prior to going to this alternative school:

Interviewer: I want to talk about school security. I've seen schools with and without metal detectors. Many alternative schools, last resort, don't have metal detectors, meaning for some last resort. Anyone want to talk about security, metal detectors, your school and or other schools and the relationship between students and security staff?

George (staff): I want to turn this over to the students, but one of our locations, we have one school safety officer. She does a great job. The students respect her. Our other site (in NYC), we share the building with other schools, there are two safety officers. There was an incident that changed things recently. Could someone talk about what happened?

Joe: There were two incidents. One was some kind of bomb threat. Then there was something about a student not being happy about how he was treated in the past. We couldn't bring any electronics. I came to school and there were like 50 security guards...like the airport security.

Jim: My old school, there was security. It was one of the bad schools.

Interviewer: Do you think security was justified? Was it necessary?

Steve: Oh no, no.

Students continued to discuss the impact increased school security has on the learner. All the students at the various sites had negative things to say about the large presence of metal detectors in their schools. Many felt as if they were not attending school:

Interviewer: How did it make you feel? Did it make you feel that you were in a dangerous place?

Jim: I had family that had been there for a while. You know, they told me that everything was fine.

Joe: I used to go to ...high school and there was security in there like the airport. The way that school is...there are like three different projects. Guns in the school, it's crazy.

Rob: Before this school, I went to ...school. I thought it was the worst. I used to come in the morning and you had to take off your bag. You had to take off everything. Felt like a jail... And I don't think that's how you should start your morning off. You could be having issues out of school and then you have to come and deal with that.

Other students acknowledged the need for security but felt the means of achieving a secure environment was ill-suited:

Interviewer: Do you think that it was necessary? Was security justified?

Jim: It was necessary but....they didn't do anything about it. If a fight broke out...ok there was an area where people would go fight. There are no cameras there.

Interviewer: Did security know that they were fighting?

Joe: Some security would, but they wouldn't do nothing about it. Some were in gangs too...they were cool with the gang members so they wouldn't do nothing about it.

Rob: I just want to say, my school...I didn't like it. There was nothing there for me. My school was right next to my old projects where I got evicted from (indicates his lower SES and family problems that can adversely affect learning). People would come from my old projects and just rob people. There would be a bunch of fights for no reason.

Interviewer: So people would come from outside of the school?

Rob: Yeah, they would tell the parents don't send your kids with any I-pod or nothing. Cuz people from my old hood would rob them.

George, a staff member in the focus group who also went to Atlantic, described what made Atlantic Academy unique. He described how the institution created a familial environment that assisted students tremendously:

Interviewer: Would you talk about the intake process at Atlantic?

George (staff): Atlantic is a multi-site school. It is a transfer school. Students have to be at least 16 years of age, already in a school setting. Some sites will take them with a minimum of 10 credits. Umm. Some other sites take them with a minimum of eight credits and at least one regents exam. So the process is first you come in and sit for the test, which is a very basic test. Then after the test, you're invited to come back for an interview. The interview is conducted by at least one staff member and two students from a particular family group. Normally, who ever you interview with, that's the family group that you would be a part of. So we don't do votes in terms of students, we come to a consensus. And that's how a student is taken in.

Interviewer: Not anybody can go to Atlantic Academy?

George (staff): Not anybody can go to the Atlantic Academy. We allow students a time to get acclimated to our community. We don't want everybody. We are not a violent community, where

people will disrespect or come to fail. I am very straight forward. We want people who want what we have.

Joe: I was shocked with the whole family group. I was afraid because I had to deal with that. I had to go back and meet with another advisor.

Interviewer: Does the family group hold each other accountable?

Steve: Yes, the leader will help control the whole group.

Students in the focus group expressed differing opinions regarding security guards in the high school environment. Some had better relationships with security guards. One thing that the students seemed to agree on is how the presence of metal detectors in their former high schools created a prison-like environment:

Interviewer: Can anyone speak about their relationships with security staff? Good relationships, bad?

Joe: To be real, I don't really like this one security guard. She is mad stank. I don't really like her attitude. The way she talks to you. I cussed her out after this one incident.

Jim: Personally I like her. She does have attitude. But she's a female and she's doing her job. I always say good morning and chat with her. I'm sorry, I see you giving me that look, but she's cool with me.

George (staff): There's a part where she has to be forceful and that's what the students see. She's good for the community.

Joe: There was this one security guy, this Asian dude. I am standing there talking to my boy, not even five minutes, and he come saying, 'you gotta leave.'

Miguel: People at other sites have better relationships with some security guards.

Jonathan: Security guards scream too much.

Vic: In my old school, the metal detectors was such a hassle.

Similarly to students who attend Atlantic Academy, those at Central enjoyed the family, therapeutic environment, the alternative school afforded them. Students add their commentary regarding school culture and describe their former schools not as supportive of them. Central

students had the third worst graduation rate of 30.6%. However, similarly to Atlantic and Plain, the students benefited from the therapeutic environment. Teachers and students like most alternative schools were on a first name basis. The teachers spoke of encouraging their students and contrary to popular belief about students at Cascade, said that their worst behaved students were from Cascade. Teachers at Central report teaching students who are rejected from larger society. Faculty report Central has a nursery, social workers, funding and regular staff from the board of education. The students and faculty members explained that an administrator at the school is actually a graduate from the school who returned to give back to the community.

Terrance: I had violent relationships with teachers and used to talk back a lot. Now I see it was not the teacher's fault and that I need to graduate.

Justin: At my last school, there was no respect when we spoke. The teachers would talk to us and not let us talk.

Bernie: Central provides support, family group, where we are able to talk out problems and not resort to violence when we're upset or angry.

Terrance: Central does not go by the book, they show more compassion, do what they can to help.

School Culture (from educators)

The mixed gender and race group of teachers confirmed the students' responses regarding the amount of support given to students who attend Central. The faculty discussed how caring for the students really helps their students tremendously. Aware of the odds many inner-city students face and the culture of poverty presented to students, the school aims to combat the adversity that students face by proudly advertising college options. According to the staff, many students do not know or think, prior to attending Central, about attending college. Key concepts for the school include leadership, emotional intelligence, and individual skills. Central is also smaller allowing for more teacher-student interaction. The school has approximately 600 students and is 59% Hispanic, 37% black, 3% white, and 1% Native American.

Interviewer: On one hand, what makes Central different from other high schools, but more importantly, what you as teachers, you all are teachers, see as being different in terms of the students you deal with? What's the focus here at Central?

Mrs. Jones: I am going to start with what makes Central different. Being here for so long, since 1982, I've kind of seen us grow in many different directions. Central has always been a place where students have been discarded by society. So the people who work here are very conscious of having a social justice, that feeling of, we are here for a reason. We're not just clocking in and clocking out. We're here to give everybody an education and an education is not just about book education. It's more about how do we live in this world? How do we cope in this world?

Interviewer: So let me ask you? Are you talking about a holistic education approach?

Definitely, definitely.

Interviewer: How do you keep them (young black and brown) students focused on the prize, which is that high school diploma? Right, while them having to deal with all that other stuff- home life and their community. These are conflicts.

Mrs. Jones: Well, I'm going to slightly disagree with you. I don't think the prize is only the high school diploma. To me that's a dead end. I think we have a bigger goal. How do we develop young people that are empowered to take on all the difficulties and I'm going to be very specific. Me being a mom, seeing young moms struggle, trying to put things in place and trying to be on time, bring the kids in, trying to be good parents, having dialogue and putting out to the various people at Central. That's one of the components. Central is a community that's very safe. It has in place social workers, a family group, teachers who take on the goal of being a mom or a dad, so that's in place. We've got now a nursery with teachers, a wonderful support staff and with a social worker also.

Interviewer: So all you have here, you don't have at other schools?

Ms. Smith: No.

Interviewer: So let me ask this. How is this funded? You have processes in place that require funding. How is this funded? Do you do it in spite of a lack of funding? How is this possible?

Mrs. Smith: Well some of the things, positions that I was talking about are regular staff, board of ed teachers, like a family group teacher, funded by the board of ed.

Interviewer: So they're teaching classes and doing this other stuff?

Mrs. Smith: Yes, many roles in this school. And then there are grants I believe and also other programs. I'm not too sure where they are funded from. I am assuming from the city or maybe even some private agencies.

Interviewer: Let's go back.

Ms. Joseph: I want to say something else. I want to underscore the community piece. One of the things that I am always impressed with is that our graduating students always come back. It makes me feel old to see someone in their thirties come back and say I want my daughter to be in your family group. It's a compliment. On one hand, I also say well we still didn't figure out how to work the problems. We have another child now coming into the system. But the other piece is, when a mother says to me I believe in you so much that I am giving you my child. To me it shows, one- that we are very successful and that she knows this is a safe nurturing community. Two we have a great dean here who graduated from Central.

Interviewer: Your dean went to Central?

Mrs. Jones: Yes. I remember chasing him in the hallway. He was studying to be a lawyer and he decided when John was principal he wanted to come back and he said you know John, I'm going to take a break and I was thinking about giving back to the community. I don't know how you put value on that. But, that's something that I see over and over.

Interviewer: Was Central an alternative high school back then?

Mrs. Smith: Yes it has always been. It was one of the first alternative high schools I believe in the seventies. I wasn't there then.

Educators from Central High discuss how they perceive black males value education. At Central, the school staff stated how No Child Left Behind is adversely affecting the students. The staff report NCLB forces them to teach to the test, which largely doesn't work for their students. Hence, NCLB is seen as maintaining the status quo because it adversely affects inner-city students, where social reproduction of the lower and working classes occurs for students of color.

Teachers speak of imparting social capital and the importance of smaller schools for students. The teachers also discuss the importance of family involvement regardless of race. The interviewer and one black male teacher discuss the prison rite of passage, quite evident in the black community, and its effect on black youth. One white and one black female teacher and two black male faculty members give their critique of NCLB and school in general:

Interviewer: In terms of Central in general. One of the things we found in other schools and education in general is the focus seems to have gone away from educating students to preparing students to pass state exams, regents. Can you talk about the effect of the demand placed on you, if

there is a demand placed on you to produce high results? What affect does this have on the educational process and processes to produce high results?

Mrs. Smith: Well I'll talk about myself teaching a course called Living Environments...Now that I have to teach to this regents and kids who are turned off from this. I have to consider how many lessons to spend on a particular unit...

Interviewer: So it affects even the teaching process?

Mrs. Jones: Oh yes.

Mrs. Smith: It goes beyond the regents and No Child Left Behind.

Interviewer: What is your graduation rate?

Mrs. Jones: Well it's difficult to assess. There is no cohort, we have rolling admissions and most are not graduating in four years. A third of our students graduate. There is a 10% drop out rate.

Interviewer: Do you think black men value education less?

Mr. Woodson: I believe black men have been socialized to value education less.

What do you mean?

Mr. Woodson: I am a black man who grew up in the city. The nucleus is peer dynamics. It was more socially accepted for the young women to go to school and be productive. I am 31-- times have changed. Now women are expected to be in jail too.

Interviewer: What about black men?

Mr. Woodson: I knew that I was going to jail. I grew up with jail as a rite of passage.

Interviewer: Did you go to jail?

Mr. Woodson: Yes.

Interviewer: Me too, so you saw it as a rite of passage.

Yes.

Interviewer: So what do you think? You deal with black men and we disaggregate race. I am talking about black Dominican and Puerto Rican men, African American urban, suburban, Jamaican, Haitian? What do you see? Do you see black men valuing education differently or one of the groups seeing it differently?

Mr. Jackson: I think the only reason anyone would disvalue education...It's not about race. It's because you don't speak about it often enough in the home.

Interviewer: So you take it back to the home.

Sure. If my mother had not told me that you should go to school, I probably would not have gone to school. If I would have gone to aviation as opposed to another school, I probably would have been a high school drop out. It was what I wanted and what she wanted. School was the exception so I don't think it has anything to do with race. The conversation isn't all about race. I was a cub scout...alter boy stuff. I was always involved in things. We weren't even thinking about jail.

Interviewer: So you didn't question the concept of going to college.

No

Interviewer: Realty, fewer men involved in higher education, not just black men. Do you think black men disvalue education more? Social demographics of the student body.

Mrs. Jones: I think that it is more socially accepted for the men to not go to school. Like it's more of they have to put on a front of I'm a tough kind of persona. I don't need it. It's not important to me. It's more important to be with my friends or in the streets. Like they're more interested in music and playing basketball and those things. But I think sometime if you get them one on one, and when you really start talking to them about what they want from their life, you'll see they really don't want that road. They're just not sure how to get there, the steps to get there.

Mrs. Smith: It goes back to the beginning stages of education. You have to look at social economics as well. I think when kids are born into poverty they have less chances from the beginning. Like they aren't educated from any earlier age. They enter kindergarten at a deficit because you have working parents who don't have the resources, perhaps or the education themselves. So from the beginning the children are not starting off at a level playing field. And it's almost a constant game of-

Interviewer: So here at Central do you find the young men in your classroom, do they accept the challenge? Do they want to be pushed? How do they respond to being pushed? Anybody?

Mr. Woodson: I think their response to being pushed has to do with who they are as a person. Like me personally, after I went through my jail rites of passage- I was ready to be pushed. I could be challenged and not break apart emotionally. But it really has to do with the collective person. What are they prepared to do? How do they see themselves?

Interviewer: How do they see themselves? Well you see, when we went to Cascade and I agree with what was said earlier about being linked and connected but when we went to Cascade, students said that, 'we appreciate the discipline. We want to be pushed.' When we go into the streets and talk to kids in other programs, [they say], 'nobody is pushing me. I don't feel accountable.' So it seems like students are looking for accountability? Someone to be accountable to? Do you find that is the case here?

Mrs. Jones: In a different way then Cascade High School. I think that we take a more developmental approach.

Interviewer: What do you mean developmental?

What I mean is that we meet every kid where they are and bring them wherever it is that they are going. As an individual. So I have plenty of black males that go to school here that can be pushed. The ones that I am most concerned about are not there, but we are working with them at the level they are at. So at Cascade they would throw them out.

Interviewer: They would throw them out into the streets?

In a hot second and so I think...My biggest behavior problems have come from Cascade High School just to let you know.

Mrs. Smith: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: We need to talk about some of that stuff. There is something going on. Where it takes a little time and maybe a little more time for others to work through that barrier that says, 'they are not pushing me. I'm gonna put it down. I'm gonna F you up.' How do you get through that?

Mrs. Smith: There is a problem dreaming.

Interviewer: What do you mean? Elaborate please?

They have a hard time envisioning what they're gonna look like when they are 25 and successful. They say to me. Miss, Ma'am, whatever they call me, 'I don't even know if I'm gonna be alive tomorrow, much less go to college. What are you talking about? You don't understand what my life is like. You don't know what I go through everyday. You have no idea.' So part of the process is kind of breaking down that actually we do understand. Maybe I haven't lived it but I got a good idea. There are a lot of other people who have lived through it and you can live through it and work around it, grow past it.

Mr. Jackson: That to me, we call it learned hopelessness. If you really ummm have any realistic plans to helping this young person get to where they want to and can go in life, you have to systemically challenge the I ain't shit, I ain't gonna be shit and it doesn't matter [attitude]. That whole ideology and belief system. That's just her thinking, that's just her psychology that it doesn't matter. We have children, people who have been told from people, family, media being told that basically they ain't gonna be shit.

Interviewer: Who are they?

Mr. Jackson: People of color.

Interviewer: Are we talking about men and women?

Mr. Woodson: We are talking about men and women exactly but specifically--

Interviewer: Poor black men and women.

Mr. Woodson: Poor black men and women who have uumm. It's everywhere. It's insidious. It's on TV. In the street society, money is everything.

Interviewer: So let me ask you something. How do black men treat black men?

Black men treat black men horribly.

Interviewer: Really?

Mr. Woodson: Of course.

Interviewer: What effect do you think that has on larger picture? The way we feel about ourselves as black men.

Mr. Woodson: It has a negative impact on us. When a lion wants to teach a cub how to hunt, she doesn't say. Sit down and listen to what I say. She says sit down in the jungle and watch as I do. So in order for young people to reproduce love and self respect and have hope and vision. They need to see this done first and foremost, by the male figures in their lives.

Interviewer: Your students are coming out of what type of community.

Across the street, so they are coming out of a lower social economic community.

Mrs. Smith: But they do come from all over the city, from Cascade, from fancy private schools.

Interviewer: What is this saying? Are these young men trying to measure up... they don't have their mother and father at home. We talk about the poor kids. Poor, rich kids also have issues. Are they the same or different?

Mrs. Jones: You're asking what do we do here?

Interviewer: Yes.

I think it's the connection. Even if they aren't doing well in school if you can make a connect. That's what we try to do here. Programs with adults, just the fact that they call each other by their first names is one step right away, that lets kids know there is something different about this place. We have the family group. We go out of the way. Someone is looking out for you. As opposed to these big schools, where they are sometimes overlooked. I think it's one of the major things that Central holds.

Mr. Jackson: I also want to jump in on that. It is also the fact, that I started college advisement a lot of the kids didn't even know they could go to college. No one ever spoke to them about it. They didn't even know that it was an option. They knew that it existed for the white kids but not for them. For them to be looking at the SATs, ACTs. They are looking at examinations where they are no longer shut out, they can be apart of the process. You have to remember we live in the new age of immediate gratification. We don't have stylized students. We have students with a lot of style. But a lot of the kids here are starting to realize because we did a study with a Census Bureau that I got off the internet that if you only or you don't graduate with a high school diploma, you make like \$269 a week or something. So we kind of broke it down and said how much money is \$269 a week? If you really want to talk about it, a pair of sneakers is probably \$175. \$269 is nothing. When they start to disvalue the fact that my god, I have to wait such a long time for an education, they are not reading the fine print. I can go to a two year and then hop on over to a four year.

Jackson's comments about teaching college options to inner city youth illustrate social capital in action. This research maintains strong schools with programs such as the one defined by Mr. Jackson can assist at risk youth tremendously and could simultaneously lower high school drop out rates and high imprisonment rates.

Interviewer: Okay let me ask you this. Do you find that kids skip high school to get their GED, where a GED means the same as a high school diploma...a job? Do you find that to be the case, where kids skip traditional high school, get the GED so that they can get to work quickly?

Mr. Jackson: In my experience, most young people think the GED process is easier and that it is not rigid. They are misinformed where they think the GED test is easier than going to high school. I happen to believe that going to high school is a lot easier. You are responsible for four years worth of stuff in an eight-hour exam. I would just do the four years and just be done with it, but that's just me. But what it is really about with the GED-a lot of the young people think the hours are smaller and there is less structure. Some of them go to school to really get their GED, some of them go to say they are still in school and you can't kick me out mommy kind of thing. You know what I'm saying, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: What I'm finding and part of our policy recommendation is that we increase the value of a high school diploma. And part of it can be offering advice; you can go to college and then demonstrating as you do the value of a dollar.

Mr. Woodson: The reason they lowered the score from 65 to 55 (requirement for regents exams in NY State) so that kids can get a chance in the CUNY system. But it is a catch 22, if you don't get over a 65, you still have to take remedial classes in college. So when we talk about educating the black male, we need to teach them the fundamentals, not just teaching them how to pass exams. It's for life. But we are talking about raising a bar for what, when in fact the bar has been lowered by the state.

Mr. Woodson raises concerns with testing in NY State in the height of NCLB. It is important to note that the Board of Regents phased in the 65 standard for graduation on five or

more required regents exams in 2005 to receive a Regents Diploma. Students with disabilities, e.g. classified as special education, still have the low-pass option of 55-64 for a Local Diploma.

Interviewer: Let's forget about raising the bar in that perspective, in something real to the students. How do we increase the value of a high school diploma, their drive to stay in school for four years?

I don't think it's a social thing. I don't think it's a what can we do. Look this is the road to success. This is how you do it. There are some kids who veer off and yeah they digress thanks and they decide to get the GED. But with the GED, you also have to put in your head, if you didn't do the four years of English or three years of math, in two days that's one hell of an examination- if you never went to school. So then the state still makes money off of us because then you go to the GED, where the state will pay the CBO to service you. Everyone is making money.

Mrs. Jones: I think that a high school diploma and GED in today's economy-neither one is very valuable. If that's your terminal degree, then you are working at McDonalds. To me it doesn't matter if you have one or the other. It matters if you're going to college and which one you stay in and complete. We have our own GED, we know kids can't do the seat time- homeless, life circumstances and they won't go to the CBO- we lose them so we developed our own program here. We pretest them, we have our own little number. It's another system of accountability that we have to belong to. We fund it out of our regular tax levy budget and they can complete high school and they participate in the prom and graduation. We don't devalue that. We say feel proud of yourself. Be happy that you did that so now you can move on to the next level as opposed to nothing. As long as it is taking them to the next level- college.

Interviewer: So how is that working out?

Mr. Jackson: It's working out wonderfully, a lot of the kids graduated and have GEDs, those who have not taken the SATs, this November, students walked into the LaGuardias, BMCCs (local community colleges in NYC). They took on that responsibility. Even the kids, who graduated before, come back and ask what they have to do.

Mrs. Jones: And our high performing kids who received a GED, just speaking to one young man today. He took the SATs, he's been accepted to six colleges, he wants to apply to four more. But he doesn't want to go to college right away, he wants to go abroad for a year and wanted me to write him a recommendation to go abroad for a year before he starts. So hey GED!

Mrs. Smith: I was going to say that too. I found that for some of the kids that are older. It's a good step to take them to college. Like you said they just can't get it together for some reason or another. I think it's a good thing and the kids who haven't been in school- they don't pass it. Usually the ones, who have been around, can pass it.

Mr. Woodson: I want to flip the whole concept of the value of the GED. We live in a society, where on average in NY State, they are only spending \$9000 a year per student. So where's the value in that? I think there has to be more systemic change about what is important in society.

Interviewer: Right so check it out- when I say increase the value of the high school diploma, not from society's position or the teacher's position or the board of ed, but from the student's position. We have people who work in cooperation with the school, funding internships with private corporations, for students to work... They pay them \$7.50 an hour to work in a studio, attorney's office, then you have situations where people like you do- you push them into college and say look this is not a terminal degree. Those are two examples of how for the students the value of a GED or high school diploma has been increased. So now we know, a lot of students in high school see the high school diploma as terminal because they haven't been told about college. Therefore it has little value because they see people in the community working for minimum wage, so they are like why should I do this?

Mr. Woodson: That is pretty much what happened to me. I look back at my mother and my stepfather and they weren't really explaining to me the concept of struggle and I looked at them as a 17, 18 year old kid, I was not picking that. If going to high school meant I was going to end up with a dead end job with a boss I wanted to choke when I come home, then I 'm gonna try my luck on the streets. I definitely understand your point now about increasing the value. We have to begin to explain to our young people, it's really tough to explain to kids who have been trying to do this for 12, 13, 14 years- okay you're going to get your diploma and then there is more school. Keeping it on the I and the present. That's the last thing the kid wants to hear. We have to make changes to the way we view education.

Interviewer: What we are doing at CUNY is increasing our relationship with community colleges and particular schools. John Jay has done away with its associate degree. So the focus is to increase the relationship and say we expect you to go to a four year school. After you do a semester at community college, you can come take a course at John Jay. A lot to consider. Stereotype- people say, 'if you get into a community college, what you weren't smart enough to get into a four year school?' How do you combat that as a college counselor?

Mr. Woodson: I went through that, sold drugs all through high school, went to school in the hood- Jamaica Queens, came home from jail, got a lot of support and signed up for school. I had to take remedial math and English. Had to do what I had to do.

Interviewer: So what made the difference in your life? What made you different than the other young men your age who were selling drugs?

Mr. Woodson: Desire for change, jail, but that is not the answer. Some who go to jail- it's like a party. I had support from others.

Mrs. Smith: What do you tell your students about trying a four year college considering your experience?

Mr. Woodson: I tell them to take one step at a time. It's a process that's unique to them. Whatever road your path has to take, that's fine. I had to take remedial math and English but it wasn't the end of the world.

Interviewer: Well that feels good and sounds good. So check this out. You are dealing with students who have to work to buy their own clothes. So you say 2 years, 4 years, 6 years, how do you get them to rationalize that when they need money now?

Mr. Woodson: We do a group (other programs the school offers) that discusses the value of an education, very similar to what they do. Where we do statistical analysis and compare a person with a high school diploma, without one and one with a college degree. On average life time income: A person that does not graduate from high school makes on average \$616,000 in their lifetime, a high school diploma 1.2 million, and a four- year degree 1.8 million. Purpose of group mirrors the information. How do you want to live and then give them an economic break down in society and then say what's next?

Interviewer: You sold drugs in high school, I sold to pay for my college degree and I was in the joint. If you were in high school, would you have listened to that advice?

If it was presented a certain way. It has to be presented in a suggestible way.

Interviewer: What's the relationship with Central Community and the larger community?

People know we exist. We have received funding. I have another issue. CUNY started this Black Male Initiative and I was there when John Hope Franklin spoke and I adore the man, but all the dignitaries were there, the chancellor. The students needed to be there. I was bummed about that. Another issue, when I ran my Latino coalition I included everybody, the BMI should not be only for black males it should be the male initiative. John Jay has cut programs- like College Now, which would be beneficial to our kids.

Interviewer: Let me say something, that's what we do. The emphasis is on underrepresented groups. We understand the process, can't say black without saying brown or poor whites. Where can communities be strengthened?

Mrs. Smith: You have to design the program. If you are under the same pressure from the Board of Regents, criteria, so you may make standards more rigid. But what you are doing is cutting out my whole population who wants to get to John Jay because they are all into CSI. They can only go to the two year college and consider transferring.

Interviewer: What can we do? I am independent of CUNY and as a researcher at John Jay, what can we do? If we cut College Now and the associates program- what can we do? What has to happen?

Mrs. Smith: We have college writing, we have the regents prep work that we have to do. I wish we can right all the educational wrongs that have been done to them. I think a school system that can address the needs of the kids is what we need. Now my children are brown, my children like myself are not going to know until high school that some don't go to college. It was not an option for them as it was not for me. We get kids in high school who read on the 4th or 5th grade level, a school system should not allow it. Parents also need to advocate.

Interviewer: Students can't write today and I have a student who is getting his master's and he cannot write, how is that possible? I will not accept their papers. How did they get there? What's happened?

Mrs. Jones: I think regents exams are trying to do that now. Older tests had more multiple choice and not a lot of writing. I went to school at Columbia and people were learning how to write and going to the writing center.

Mr. Jackson: A lot of our students are looking at two year schools, maybe fear of the ACT or SAT, one young girl enrolled in College Now at LaGuardia.

Interviewer: What can we do to have more students from Central High attend John Jay?

It would be nice to have Columbia and John Jay along with graduate students have people come and have conversations and relationships with our students...it doesn't involve money.

Mrs. Smith: For me, the goal is to have a variety of different messengers. Someone they can relate to. Students have a host of problems- homelessness. This may be the place where they get their only source of food. Need staff that can work with the students, social workers, family group.

Mr. Jackson: When I was at PR (speaking of another school), I hired trainees, they were black, Russian, Bengali from all over. They came to teach the kids and the kids learned.

Faculty at Central High provides policy suggestions to increase educational outcomes for at risk youth. The concept of having college students develop mentoring relationships and having dialogues with high school youth should occur in all schools. Local college students could receive community service hours and recognition from their college and the high schools.

The faculty at Hudson just like those at Central, describe how the small therapeutic environment benefited the students in their ATI, Alternative to Incarceration site. Students that attend Hudson have all been involved in the criminal justice system. The following exchange highlights the programs at Hudson between the interviewer and four mixed gender and race faculty:

Interviewer: What we should begin here is basically...What is the role of education in your ATI program? What programs do you provide... to the students?

Mrs. Gale: So, we have tutoring components where is ...involved with which is just testing, basic testing. One is... kind of an internship, job ready discover...the other part is kind of an academic

piece where we try to get [students] toward the GED. So essentially[we work] from the literacy level all the way to the high school level and now even beyond when we gonna try to give some stuff that is both on the high school level and college level.

Interviewer: So, you say pre- college, college prep. All right, so let me ask, what do you think and I don't ... ok I teach two tracks, one track is ABE GED and college prep and the other track is career development...Why do you think your program is different from other GED programs?

Mrs. Gale: Well we have small class sizes, we have more teachers in the classrooms than other GED programs have, we also have the ability to kinda communicate as a larger group during the... setup services like for example we have the Art therapy in our program.

Interviewer: Well, what is Art therapy?

Mrs. Gale: Well, mainly I work with the team of special workers and hmmm we're part of the Mental House Services component of our program so within our therapy we do individual work and also we do group therapy work. So in that group therapy is more like psycho-educational work and so we talk a lot about hmmm choices and controversial thinking and we work on interpersonal skills and that's more of emotional supportive component.

Interviewer: So, support for the participants from other participants from staff...ok. So, what other programs do you have that are part of them that is more... Not necessarily the career track right? Before career track what do you have in place that allows the individual to develop?

Mr. Jones: Day care. When they first come in the door, they meet with the team leader direct to our case management and then they are able to get an assessment that is needed. They get the Individual Life Case Manager who then comes up with like a client specific trial and they track {them}...

Interviewer: So, you develop the plan for each of the clients.

Mr. Jones: Yeah, I think gender doesn't control as a matter of fact.

Interviewer: Yeah, talk about that.

Mrs. Gale: So, basically case management like Mr. Jones said when the participants get to come to our program they meet with the team director, after about one or two days they get the Final Case Manager. Once they stop working with the Case Manager they get to find to...they actually start going to assessment and the assessment basically means that--- you know we have to obtain information from them in education, employment, their illegal involvement, their living environment, peer associations so that we can basically get an overall view of [their needs].

Interviewer: Ok, now let me ask you. These are ATI participants?

Mrs. Gale: Yes

Interviewer: All right and your ATI participants are referred to by the court, mandated by the court?

Mr. Jones: Exactly

Interviewer: So, all of your clients are sent to you by the court, investment police.

Mr. Jones: Yes

Interviewer: When you talk about your assessment form and are you in a position to look at your intake form and then you start your program right? Have you evaluated your programs to see how successful they have been? I mean what's your history? Is this ongoing 5-6 years or...?

Mrs. Gale: I'm sorry I'm not...

Interviewer: You don't know, what your success rate is? Approximately how many programs do you do...

Mrs. Gale: Well is...wow that's the good question I really don't... I mean we have high grades for testing but I can't tell you exactly what the first test...

Mrs. Gale not knowing the success rate isn't uncommon considering the lack of communication between the administration and teachers that exists in schools. Many times students will relocate, have chronic illnesses, enter a new school or program within the school, long before I am told in my school. Better communication should exist between teachers, administration, and counselors.

Mr. Jones: In general, more than 70% of our intakes complete the 6 month portion of the mandated program.

Interviewer: So, you got 70% of...

Ms. Jacobs: Last check I think it was 74%.

Interviewer: 74% ok now that's wonderful. All right you say small class size, more teachers one on one, you've got the structure set up... instructions are placed to facilitate that program. Seventy-four percent are accepted. Why are they successful and other programs are not?...

Mrs. Gale: The thing is that besides you know staff working here with the individual we also include the family... [if we sense other issues are affecting the students] or maybe you know other issues outside and maybe in the streets and the family. Then what we do is that we tend to bring in the families here so they can get to discuss the issues with us even if the issue is behavioral. Then

we like to you know if the parents are aware of what's going on with them here or any other issues outside of here that the parents may not be aware of, so by bringing it to the parents then you know we can provide not the support to the individual but also to families as well. So...the services that we provide here are not only on an individual basis for participants hmmm being alone but you know it's a family need let's say [they need help]. We try to get resources for them [the family] so they can navigate through the system and make the process easier for them...

Interviewer: All right, here are the teachers, the staff. What about the Criminal Justice community, when do all they blend in?

Mr. Jones: Well, we need the judges. I think across the board, the exception of the few openly strict judges gave us some time to work with some of the kids. Our programs from the Career Program to Literacy, to Pre GED, to Case Management, to Substance Abuse, to the Mental Health everything serves this population. Every time our program is designed it's[taking away from the] adolescent criminal justice population...and then the judges, and probation, and lawyers give us some time to work through some of the issues the kids [have]... Again with the exception of the couple of judges you know it allows the kids to work throughout patience at different levels of this treatment. If the kid finished school and needs work, it allows us to work with him in the Career Program, so I think the criminal justice piece gives us... [assist us]. My theory is only this if the judge gives us this kid he or she doesn't want to spend time in prison, they are giving us an opportunity to work with these kids until the judge says all right you know what...

Interviewer: Now let me ask you this. Let's go to the other track, the career track. What I want to...some of the things you know I would be interested in knowing would be what tracks exist? Is there a difference across gender as well as well as race? As a matter of fact, what's your population in terms of race...?

Ms. Jacobs: Black and Hispanic male.

Interviewer: Why Hispanic and black? All right so black Hispanic males. What is your career track, what is that?...

Ms. Jacobs: The career pieces is we vote for career pieces and a program called Co-exploration hmmm there are three coordinators. Step one: three cycles a year, we service 128 students and what we do is we resend the students for weekly jobs...In a training program we do everything from applications to interviewing skills, problem solving in the workplace, speaking and presentations. We basically created an employee and how to keep your job and then we have founded a facility for students from Kennedy Paid Internships and various organizations around the city from law firms to magazines to political offices.

Interviewer (to another staff member): Ok, so what do you do?

Mr. Ronald: I am a case manager and my job is to evaluate where the participant is at and then meet that with a certain program whether it's education. My job is to [supply]whatever services he needs to get.

Interviewer: Ok, so you're making discussions.

Mr. Ronald: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: What are the problems, what do you see?

Mr. Ronald: Majority of the problems fall [under education] and[students] usually[are] not in schools but in...

Interviewer: But in facilities, tell us what you are talking about first...

Mr. Ronald: We are talking about hmmm like he said minorities: males, blacks, and Hispanics between ages of 16 to 19 and most of them dropped out of school and are not in high school.

Interviewer: Dropped out of high school or while in school...where do they go?

Mr. Ronald: Some before and some got involved with two years of high school maximum. We do have a few guys with the GED but that's rare, that's the minority. So my job is to assess it and then make a referral to the education unit that he can get that taken care of.

Interviewer: Do you see these young men... are they a threat, are they...where do they fit? Are they gang members, do they try to get home after school?

Mr. Ronald: All of the above and when we evaluate them these are all the obstacles that we have hmmm to get them into the program, so it's not easy, so we have to look at the entire value and see what we are working with.

Interviewer: Yeah, so do you find any difference? Are you finding differences in terms of other problems, differences between the young men versus young women? Are there problems versus let's say you know the Hispanic population versus the black population? Do you look at differences across ethnic groups...to compare with...Haitians compare with Latin Americans, Dominicans...ethnics? Where do you find differences?

Mr. Ronald: Some of the differences will have to do with the family upbringing, the culture that affects us, if they're abused and how the certain behavior may affect different students...

Interviewer: What do you mean? How is it different?

Mr. Ronald: Cultures, some cultures don't really respect I don't know how to explain it better but some cultures are high opinioned and so hmmm...and in others the love and family may not be as strong as in others...

Interviewer: Ok, so the American culture the role may be not as important as you say another culture...

Mr. Ronald: That's a possibility. I have one. He is 16 years old, and he is on a team... and he feels his job is to be the man. And so he doesn't have a job on the books so mainly what he has to do is to try to support his mother and be the man of the house.

Interviewer: Let me ask on that note. What percentage of the young people that you deal with are not employed on the formal market but you know they're working in the underground economy and that doesn't mean that they're selling drugs, they maybe selling CD's all right? They maybe working off the book? We like getting trash too, that's not necessarily bad I want \$1 for a \$1, right? So, I mean within that concept what percentage of the young men and women that you deal with do you think are really making deals with the informal economy? Talk to me...

Ms. Jacobs: Right, one thing they maybe doing is hustling and stuff...We can't really allow kids to do that work off the books. We don't know.

Interviewer: Because you don't know, right. I mean as professionals that 30% of all black men who are currently unemployed are engaged in criminal activity. Will that be because they don't have money- all right? So, because of the market doesn't always mean they are breaking the law... So, what do you think? Do you think that the population for the men's part are not employable...

Mr. Jones: I would say the majority of our Hudson's students are not employable, but once they go through the [process], the correct process of some type of basically light skills process---

Interviewer: Light skills versus work skills?

Mr. Jones: Right, I mean kids can work, I mean once when they enter an internship or they find work our kids can continue to work as long as they display [effort] and show up but finding work is probably tough... Then it usually leads to a hustle or other illegal forms of making money.

Interviewer: So...how do they (students about Hudson) feel?

Mrs. Gale: How do they feel?

Interviewer: Yeah, you know are they excited when they come in, energetic with conversation? What's going on, or what kind of grades do they get?

Mrs. Gale: Well, I think it's I mean it varies exactly. You know, let's say for instance maybe 50% of them might be interested openly you know interested to continue with the education as half of them may not be hmmm I mean there are different factors...again talking about going back to family structure and everything in the culture. They maybe doing work at other points in their education to provide for the family source... they have you know children themselves and that can be a factor hmmm.

Interviewer: So, let me ask you two simplistic questions. Are there particular populations (in tracks), cultural populations, populations in gender, are they...?

Mrs. Gale: I think it's just the factors you know that they have or the structures or whatever is going inside and or outside our program. I would say the percentage is actually a little higher than 50% but again before you know they wanna work. They want to...sometimes they don't have parents or anything that would guide them, support them so they...so if they get a full time job they...

Interviewer: They don't have time for skills. They don't have to study. This is what I am trying to get at...these are real issues. These are not bad kids. We know how many juveniles are children. We know that real things happen. Right?

Mr. Jones: That's also a start of correlation, our kids are one time offenders, so you know the first time... they just got arrested for the first time. They already experience violence... (talking about their home and community setting)... it's probably we're already in school regularly you know those kids (speaking of repeat offenders who need help at the initial stage of the criminal justice system) they're you know repeat offenders, mostly felons were arrested 6-7 times who are less likely to have been in school in the last two years and getting them back into school is a little tough. I remember when I worked with the court's representative and you know the kids that have long you know long wrap sheets haven't been in school for years.

Staff at Hudson highlights the various themes included in this research, e.g., importance and effect of strong schools and family networks. Working with such an at-risk population, the staff sees first hand the effects of the penal system and weak communal and familial networks on children of color. Most of the students who attend Hudson are Hispanic and black males, whom are already in the school to prison pipeline that the Criminal Justice Working Group at John Jay College seeks to address. Hudson staff's comments also highlight the importance of imparting social capital and issues with self-esteem for many troubled inner-city youth.

Research shows that white men with prison records are more likely to receive a call back from an employer when seeking work, than black men without records (Travis, 2005). Nonetheless, black men with prison records fear far worse when seeking employment. Without an adequate chance to reenter society, the staff correctly notes that black males enter the illegal market as survival means and thus enter a vicious recidivist cycle.

School culture (from students)

Students continue to suggest that large class sizes, low teacher expectation, and violence in schools discount learning. Students who attended Plain Academy had the worst graduation rate of the schools included in this study at 10.3%, and the second to worst attendance rate of 59%. Plain is 85% black, 13% Hispanic, 1% white, 1% Asian, and 1% American Indian. Despite reporting some of the worst rates, many students who attended Plain completed the Learning to Work program and spoke highly of the school. The school is credited as a second chance, alternative small school (200 enrollment) for alienated or lost students. The youngest students range from 17 years of age and are listed as either sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Most students have credits from their previous schools. The school is relatively new and has been in existence for less than five years. Students have a matriarch as the school leader. The average graduating class has approximately 30 students with a third receiving regents' diplomas. The school is a small learning, skill based environment with class size ranging from 16-20 pupils.

According to the faculty, Plain Academy maintains high academic requirements for all students by encouraging them to graduate with a regents' diploma, 44 credits and 5 regents passed, as well as encouraging honors level classes. With a unique approach to learning, the school allows students to begin a paid internship once they achieve more than half of the credit requirements. Students build their resumes and learn work experience. Additionally, students develop portfolios based on their interests, academics, and goals, attend college fairs, and do mandatory community service. One student in a mixed level group of black underclassmen explained how the school culture in traditional schools lowers student morale:

Tony: The students fight with the teachers. The teachers fight with the students. No focus.

Jay added: The schools are overpopulated and the class sizes are huge.

Tony continued to discuss violence in city schools. He explained how gang activity adversely affects the learners:

Tony: Kids kick you down the steps and beat you up.

Students explained how school environment and teacher expectation influence them positively.

One of the students stated that Plain afforded him a chance at learning with individualized attention:

Jay: I learn... I actually learn something in this school. I passed science, I never passed science before.

Interviewer: Why?

Because I have more attention from the teacher. We have a stable environment. We feel safe here. We interact with teachers and students.

Frank in agreement said, There's only about 200 some odd kids in this school, the principal even knows your name.

Frank continued to explain that racism and classism attributed to the teachers' attitudes towards them in their old school:

In our old school, they (the teachers) just go about what they hear, they don't figure out or ask different questions, we live in the hood, they don't know, they live in the suburbs, they estimate.

Lance in a focus group of all seniors agreed with the underclassmen:

Here, it's easier to learn because it's a smaller school, not as big as the other school. The teacher is gonna be more with you. The population in the other school, there's too many students.

Interviewer: What is your proudest moment at Plain?

Lance: My report card, my grades went up. I haven't failed a class since I've been here. My average is a 85.

Interviewer: Why is it that here, you find the ability to get higher averages, 85s?

Lance: A smaller environment. In a smaller environment you're going to produce more work because they're gonna be looking at you more often, they're talking to you more, commenting on your work. So, you're gonna want to be doing work for someone to check it for you to do it.

Interviewer: So there is a sense of pride in what you're doing?

Lance: Yes.

Jerry: I come to school everyday, I never did that before, that's new to me. Come to class everyday, sit in class, do homework. I'm doing better. I'm happy. (Plain Senior)

In a focus group of six mixed faculty at Plain, one staff member spoke of working in previous schools and admitted that it was impossible to know all the students in a large school, which lends credence to the creation of smaller schools:

I was a dean in a junior high school and the one thing I could say when I was there as a dean was a large amount of students were unknown to me. There was about two to three-hundred kids in a grade and parents used to come up and tell me their child's name and I was like well unfortunately I have no idea who your child is which is a good thing because I only knew the kids who were most disruptive. There were honestly kids in there who have come up to me in Queens that are like, 'Yeah, I went to your school' and I'm like, 'Oh yeah, great.' I have no idea who that child is.

Teacher expectation

Students at Central discuss how teachers in their former schools treated them and how they felt no real sense of belonging as black males. Students spoke of low teacher expectation and racism.

Interviewer: Do you feel respected here at Central?

Ronny: Yes, they push me.

Interviewer: Do you get respect from white teachers?

Terrance: Other white teachers at other schools don't respect black males and are afraid of us. They don't live near us.

Give an example?

Terrance: If I raised my voice, they would flinch and call security- made me feel like I couldn't work in a white environment.

Bernie: One teacher believed this boy would do damage to him. He didn't want him in his class anymore. He felt threatened by my friend.

Justin: White teachers here don't look at us like ganstas, or Neanderthals. Here they treat us like a human instead of as uh (a) animal.

Ronny: More respect results in better grades...In regular high school they expect you to fail.

Ronny speaks about the importance of positive teacher and student relationships and strong schools with positive school cultures. Some of the students in the underclass mixed gender group at Plain Academy believed their teachers at their old schools had low expectations of them because they were minorities:

Sonya: Just because we're black or Hispanic, they think we're bad.

Another student felt that teachers were nearing retirement and thus did not put forth complete effort when instructing the class. One student questioned the sincerity of his teachers:

Larry: Teachers are burnt out. They don't care about the students, they were just here for the money. They'll tell you, 'ah well, you don't have to do anything. I'm still gonna get paid.'

Everyone else in the focus group responds in unison:

All: yeah

Although I do not condone the word choice, as an educator I can understand why a teacher, perhaps out of frustration who has put forth much effort into lesson plans, would make such a statement to a class of learners who appear to be apathetic. Still educators need to take into account the learners' environments and skill levels. Many teachers are either unaware or don't take into account the types of environments where many students reside. Still, the notion of awareness does not remove responsibility from the learner but should be used for class discussions and lessons that may reengage the learner. Students' comment of teachers who "keep it real" as teachers who are sincere, share life stories, and thus make learning relevant (e.g. making relevant connections when teaching economics: supply and demand to the cost of Jordan sneakers or the Wii) as conducive to learning.

Throughout this study, students highlight the many adversities faced almost nonchalantly. Seeing violence, whether domestic or in the community becomes all too normal for many impoverished students. If place of residence, food, and violence plague one's thoughts, then school takes second place. Although not all structural ills can be eradicated, programs before and after school that are adequately funded along with teachers who are certified would assist the students who need it most.

Teacher expectation: Apathetic teachers vs. empowering teachers

Students at MARSHALL High agreed with the students who attended Plain about how teachers treated them. In a focus group of freshmen, Pete said:

I had a hard time getting along with my teachers. Some of the teachers in there would act like they don't have to, they don't have to teach us, they can just sit back and do what they want and get paid. And they'll tell us these things and I'll sit there and I'll look and I wouldn't like it so I would react.

Interviewer: What do you mean they would tell you these things, give me an example of something they'd tell you?

Pete: Like I had one teacher in the school who was like, if ya'll don't wanna learn, I don't have to sit here and teach. I can just sit back, give out some class work, don't teach it to ya'll and I'll still get paid for this. So, I would take that very offensively.

Stephen: Most of the teachers, they don't teach, most of them don't teach, they just give out handouts.

Interviewer: Ok, so talk about that, they don't teach... they give out handouts? What do you mean?

Pete: There's a difference between gettin' up and going in front of the board and like what Ms. Smith does when giving out handouts...the other teachers just tell you to find the definition of this word and everyday the same thing.

Interviewer to Stephen: You're shaking your head yes?

Stephen: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, what do you mean? Do you agree with what he's saying?

Yeah.

Interviewer: Gimme an example.

Stephen: Because most of the teachers just give us handouts and tell us to look for stuff in the book.

Interviewer: So, they're really not interacting with you?

Stephen: No. (throughout the focus group).

Pete: What Ms. Smith does is like get up and teach, she do all kinds of stuff, tell us to go on the computer and read..., get a novel and all that stuff, that can help you learn and stuff. Some teachers don't bother doing that, they just throw a handout to you and tell you to go get a textbook and read.

Interviewer: Anybody else?

Antonio: Back to what he said, Ms. Smith, she explains everything properly if you don't understand it, she will keep on explaining it and explaining it until we understand it and she would ask like kid, um, knowledge, like she would ask someone to explain it from the class so we understand it perfectly and she just doesn't leave like some of the other teachers we have.

Interviewer to others: What do you have to say?

Dre: Like they were saying about the handouts, I think that most of the teachers give handouts because they can't teach because they're weak and they can get stepped over by the kids so easily and overpowered and after a few years of trying and trying and trying, you give up and you just can't do it anymore but you're still getting paid for the job. Why can't you do it, I mean, if you're gonna get paid to just sit there, man I'd rather do that too, maybe I'll be a teacher.

Dre's comments although striking, because as an educator, I know the amount of preparation put into lessons and teaching, depict the importance of certified teachers and strong schools for all youth. Lucas in a focus group of all male juniors at Cascade said:

My sophomore year we had a teacher and she basically told us about the percentile of how many black men go to college and that's a motivational factor. You have to beat them. You have to accomplish something.

It is unsure if Lucas's perception of the teacher's comment was condescending or not. Whether it was or not, Lucas used it as a motivational force. Ronny from Central explained how the culture of the school influenced his educational experiences.

Ronny: My old school was different. The teachers didn't really care about you, it was a big school, Here at Central they realize it is our last chance and the faculty is trying to help us.

Teacher involvement (Private vs. Public)

Most of the students who attended Cascade high school also attended public high schools, which allow them to compare and contrast their experiences. All of the students prefer the private school environment over the traditional school. Sophomores at Cascade discussed their perceptions of teachers in their former schools and now in their private school.

Alex: Well teachers in public schools, they really didn't care. They were all about their money. If they wasn't getting their money then they wasn't teaching. Catholic school they care about you. If you were having problems at home, they would talk to you about it. They invited you to dinners. They did things that basically your parent would do, if you didn't have one.

Alvin in agreement: Teachers at private institutions seemed to be doing their job and or going the extra mile.

While talking about private school teachers' involvement, in a student's life, Corey said, *They teach you how to go down the street and talk to people and interview for jobs and how to be a civilized black person growing up in a dysfunctional community.*

Alvin: I really don't know what pushes them (other students) but for me going here, what pushes me to learn is in the classrooms, it's different, and the teachers are concerned. They take the time out to help you so you will wanna be better. So, it's a big difference from public school because they really don't have nobody pushing you.

When describing the catholic school environment and teacher expectation, Alex and Alvin speak of social capital that Coleman (1988) purported in his research.

Public vs. private school environment

Sophomores at Cascade continue to contrast their experiences in the public and private school environments. Students describe apathetic teachers and weak school structure in their former public environments.

Alex: I went to a public school, it's different from catholic schools, like I've been (robbed). Like I didn't like doing homework. I didn't like going to class. As soon as I got out of public school I went to catholic school, to Cascade, my grades were different. I was in honors two times last year and my grades was higher because when you take out the things that was in junior high school with the women and it's different, you know, you still everybody's friends but you still gotta do your work to succeed.

Alvin: When I went to catholic school, everything is different the teachers cared. They were stricter, you had to be on top of your game. You had to do your work, pass all your classes or

you'd be getting kicked out. In public school that was different like if you didn't pass all your classes or do your homework, teachers didn't care, it was like you had nobody to support you or be on your back, to tell you to keep up and helping you to make something of yourself.

Jonny: Public school basically was totally different from catholic school. You have people that wanna bring you down but also wanna be your friend because of the name (game) that you have in school, if you are a good person. Catholic school the teachers cared more, the work was even harder than it would have been if I was still in public school. Going to public school, I didn't really wanna go to class. I felt I was the smartest kid in the school, I mean, I knew all the work, the work was a breeze through. It was like, why should I be here? They teach you how to be a man; they care for you. They put you under their wing if you don't have anybody in your corner.

Tom the freshman at Cascade reports the environment not being very different from his last school. His report could vary from the others due to his short time at the school as a freshman or because his previous school was one of learning and quite different from his peers. Tom mentions more discipline occurring at Cascade:

So far in high school it's been the same since middle school it's just that now it's more strict. They enforce discipline more that you're in high school. I think it's because the type of system I'm in right now. Last year I went to public school and now I'm in the catholic school system and that's basically the difference.

Negative peer influences

Interviewer states to the students at MARSHALL the notion of gang members not valuing education and dissuading youngster from going to school. He says that kids in the community who do not attend school taunt those who do go to school and call them names such as nerd or a punk.

Interviewer: Is that true?

Vaughn at MARSHALL High in response says: Sometimes it depends on who you are. If you're like a popular person, you're going to school, you're smart, you dress nice, then people wouldn't talk to you like that, because I know a lot of people like that. But then if you're on the quiet side and you go to school all the time and don't have fun with the rest of them, then they're gonna start calling you names and want you to cut with them. They're gonna call you a nerd and it's gonna make them feel bad, now they might start doing things bad just like everybody else. (MARSHALL High Juniors)

Interviewer speaking to students at Atlantic: *Would it be difficult having to deal with old friends or people you know who may not be doing the right thing. Could that interfere with school? Do you have to deal with that kind of stuff?*

Steve: Not me personally.

Rob: Right now I can't be fully attending Atlantic for that same situation. You can't bring people to your school, but I didn't bring anyone; he just showed up. He's my friend, like my brother, so I don't hold it against him.

Alternative lifestyle once leave school

The male students at Plain Academy in a mix gender and grade group explained what they believed young girls who left school were doing. John believed most young women left due to pregnancy. With the recent rise in teenage pregnancies, he may be accurate:

Interviewer: Young women who are not in school are--How are they making money?

Jay: Pregnant, babies.

Tony believed that some young women might have actually left school as a means of survival. He also uses socially constructed ideas of femininity to explain what he believed these young girls were doing. His beliefs most likely stem from the media and the image of the black welfare queen. Although there are more whites per capita and hence more poor whites, the media helps spread the following stereotypes. Still, most Americans do not acknowledge the former.

Tony: Working, selling their bodies, braiding hair, McDonalds, welfare. When it comes to that money, women will do anything. Some get child support, lie. They get on welfare, they think that's how life is, like, there is some women out there that have babies just to get on welfare. So they can get by without having to go to work, without having to go to school.

Students, who attended Hudson Community High School, an ATI, Alternative to Incarceration Program, discussed their high school experiences. Even though students had limited literacy skills and poor attendance rates, students explain (later on) the benefit of attending a transitional school of this nature. Students expressed concern and commitment on their behalves about their education just as students from the other alternative schools, Atlantic and Central, did. Hudson offers intensive academic training, and preparation for attending another community school, GED program, or job readiness (Miller, Ross, & Sturgis, 2005).

Because students who attend Hudson are ill prepared academically and many socially, the school focuses on academic and social skills. The school also offers recreation, rolling admission for students released from custody, tutoring, and family involvement. The staff also collaborates with the justice system (Miller, Ross, & Sturgis, 2005). Most of the students at Hudson described what life was like once they left school. Some attribute negative peer pressure and instant gratification as reasons they left school. The following exchange describes the six male students who all were involved in the criminal justice system before:

Interviewer: What was high school experience like?

Nick: I wouldn't go to school hung out with my boys.

Interviewer: Did you value education?

Nick: Hung out with girls, didn't care about nothing, realized education better than nothing at all.

Jack: I've had experiences of teachers screaming at me. My freshman year I cut everyday, regret that now. I'm already 19 could have graduated.

Interviewer: Why did you cut?

Jack: I would leave with friends, then got a girlfriend, me and her cut everyday, then just dropped out. I would go to hookie parties- go and have drinks, I don't smoke, just drink.

Arnold: It wasn't no girl; I chose the streets.

One student explained that he left school in order to provide for his family:

Rob: I was working, had a kid, had to get a job.

Most of the students describe broken social bonds with school early on but students realize if want to survive outside of legal system they must conform to middle class values- education. The students do not seem to understand why the bonds have been broken and why they did not value education early on, just had life altering experiences, e.g. legal system that forced them to change their ways. One student explains:

Arnold: I was smart but that wasn't making no money right now. Now I see, can't hustle for too long, need an education- will take you a long way.

Rob: I dropped out in junior high- 13 or 14. I started making money- doing me. I had a baby and knew my money should be up there. I was worried about making money.

Rob's description of his junior high experience highlights the notion of instant gratification. After attempting his time in the street and early manhood, Rob had to deal with the tasks that sometimes come with adult like living. He had a baby and thus needed to make money and survive. His comments depict the many adversities that affect some inner city students.

The following response illustrates how important extracurricular activities are for students who are not engaged in school academically. Of course, not being involved in extracurricular activities is not the sole reason a student will leave school, but school activities can increase attachment to school for some students:

June: I got kicked off the basketball team and then left school. If that didn't happen, I would have stayed.

Interviewer: Where are other black males? What are they doing?

June: Some go to school and hustle at night.

Luis at Cascade describes what he believes most students are doing when they leave school:
Most of the kids that I know that don't go to school have dropped out at a young age and most of them sell drugs.

Interviewer: Anybody else, do you know any kids who aren't going to school or quit school?

Luis: Yeah, my friend he quit middle school and he can't go to high school. You can just say his life is thrown away. It's not thrown away cuz he can work hard to get back up there where he's at but it's thrown away cuz he don't want to.

How old is he?

Luis: He's 15.

And you're saying his life is thrown away because...?

Luis: He got a child.

So what does that mean, he has to work to take care of the child? What?

He don't work legally.

What does that mean?

He works illegally, he sells drugs.

The freshmen at Cascade describe what they believed young girls are doing once they leave school:

Alex: They hook up with the big man on the block and they feel that if they have sex with him he'll pay their way through life. If they have sex with a certain person, that's like a regular (deal) cuz if they met Michael Jordan tomorrow the average black American girl would have sex with him because he has money.

You think?

And they say that if they could get him a good enough time in bed, he'll pay some of their ways through life.

Alvin: I was going to say that, like he said, he said they hook up with some of these superstars they have money. They try to have sex with them and see if they pregnant, so they find out they have the meal ticket so if they have a baby by the person, they have to pay the child support.

Interviewer: So you're thinking that some young women hook up with men who have money and get pregnant on purpose?

Yeah, cuz they find out they get that meal ticket and they know you have some money.

The students' images of black females most likely resonate from the media and the glorified image of the Welfare Queen. Contrary to popular thought, there are more poor whites and whites on welfare because there are more whites per capita. Nonetheless, students from various sites had quite a perception of females in schools. Tony's comments from Plain confirmed Alvin's statement:

They get on welfare, they think that's how life is, like, there is some women out there that have babies just to get on welfare, so they can get by without having to go to work, without having to go to school. (Plain Mix)

Socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity

Students from the Plain mixed group continue to use socially constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity to explain the current plight of blacks in society:

Tony: They (society) made it that women supposed to be this way, men are supposed to be that way. Men equals construction, women equals home with the babies.

Interviewer: Women value education more than men? Evidence of that.

Tina: Yes, me, I value education more than my brother. He dropped out of high school when he was 17.

Interviewer: How does that play a role in the lives of young black men and women?

Tina: Even at school, they have more female teachers than male teachers (school is 77% female), so the boys are not really focusing because the females are everywhere.

The presence of more females could serve as a distraction for many young men and depict the lack of male mentors. Young men at Cascade agreed with Tina and reported females to be a distraction in their previously integrated school. Sophomores at Cascade discuss their perceptions of females. During the focus groups, students mentioned that attending an all male school was better than attending a traditional school. They cited girls as distractions, thus supporting single sex schools and classes as being more successful. Their stance contradicts Noguera's notion of single sex male schools as being hyper-masculine. The students discuss the implications the opposite sex plays on education.

Alvin: As soon as I got out of public school I went to catholic school, to Cascade, my grades were different.

Alvin's earlier statement regarding female distraction in public school follows: *I was in honors, two times last year and my grades was higher because when you take out the things that was in junior high school with the women and it's different, you know, you still everybody's friends but you still gotta do your work to succeed.*

Alvin's and his peers' statements imply that the presence of women interferes with their learning.

Interviewer: So, what we're going to do is begin with your educational experience. What has education been like for you? What's school been like for you?

Alex: It's been a great experience because I'm not used to going to school with a whole bunch of boys but at the same time it's kinda fun...It's more easier to concentrate.

What do you mean?

Luis: Because when you get older, girls come into play and I would rather get my work done and it's more easier to get my work done. (Cascade Freshman)

Ricky: School for me has been rough at first. I was the type of kid who didn't like to go to school, I thought school was boring until my father and my mother sat down and told me that you need school to succeed and do things in life. I was the type of kid who always liked to be around the girls, I was a lady's man and now that I'm in Cascade High School with a whole bunch of boys, it's more easier for me to concentrate and get my work done. I'm more focused on the work cuz I'm not gonna look at a girl. So, I'm more focused on the work and it has been great, it has been really great, my grades are up and everything. (Cascade Freshman)

Ricky's comments support the notion that single sex schools are more fruitful, especially for boys.

He also discusses the importance of social capital being imparted by strong family networks, in his instance, his mother.

Students at Central discuss the media's impact on education and why they believe black females value education more.

Interviewer: What about music industry, do they encourage education?

Bernie: Cameron has a song, say I ain't going to college to make 30K a year and have to pay back student loans.

Justin agrees with Bernie but doesn't credit economics rather gender differences:

*Black females value it more, they want to be independent start their own families, can't depend on no, no good n****.*

Bernie's comments about economics are not far off. Rather in our increasingly shrinking economy, many companies have gone overseas leaving ripple effects in communities, which range from the closing of restaurants, loss of homes, and tax bases to support infrastructures and schools. This loss brings great devastation to communities that rely on employment from pharmaceutical companies,

factories as seen in the nineties, and automotive companies such as Ford. In March of 2008, 80,000 jobs were cut causing the unemployment rate to rise from 4.8% to 5.1% (Grynbaum, 2008). As of November in 2008, 1.2 million jobs were lost causing the unemployment rate to rise to 6.3% (CBS News, 2008). The financial meltdown on Wall St and then Main St in 2008 has had exacerbating effects on the country, e.g. lost of employment, homes, and sharp losses in pensions for near retirees.

Still, the current unemployment rate does not accurately depict who is most affected. Twelve percent of American Indians and 11% of blacks were unemployed in 2005 compared to 6% of Hispanics, 5% of whites and 4% of Pacific Islanders. The rate of unemployment has fluctuated in the past 10 years without much change, where blacks have always had a higher rate than that of whites. The rates increase dramatically as the years of schooling and age decrease. In 2005, blacks with less than a high school diploma had an unemployment rate of 24%, compared to 11% for those with a diploma, and to 4% for those with a bachelor's degree or more. For those with high school diplomas between the ages of 16-24, 11% of whites and 12% of Hispanics were unemployed, while an alarming 25% of blacks, twice the rate of white and Hispanics, were unemployed (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Research also shows that whites with a criminal record are more likely to be hired than blacks without a criminal record (Travis, 2005).

Due to the former statistics, it is not surprising that many young black males do not believe the education system is a vehicle for success; nor is it surprising that black males choose fast money in the streets. Students from many impoverished communities lack social capital and positive role models. These youth do not see lawyers, doctors, professors, entrepreneurs, middle-class professionals regularly as a youngster coming from middle or upper class backgrounds. Children usually emulate what they see. Additionally, these children are excluded from elite social

networks and do not have access to advanced educational resources and opportunities. More programs, i.e. mentoring, need to be created for more children to understand the correlation between education and success. Policymakers should also considering lowering the cost of college and interest rates on student loans.

Sex differentials in the value of education

The students attending Hudson understand gender inequality but do not completely understand why it exists or why and if black females value education more. They struggled in their explanation of black men who have been emasculated throughout history. The following describes the students' perception of females and education:

Interviewer: Do you think women of color value education more than males?

June: Then they with you cuz of your money. It's a true story you know, some may not be physically attractive- making money, young kats feel they have to do this.

Arnold: It all depends on how the parents raised them up, mentality, if raised the right way, if not gonna wanna do what everyone else is doing. This is what I try to tell my cousins who are 16, 15, 14. They don't want to listen. I tell them that they don't have to go out there and hustle can be with someone who is not hustling.

Some other students attribute the sex differentials to socially constructed ideas of femininity and masculinity:

Arnold: Not all women, everyone is different, if raised the right way will value education more than men.

Nick: Get money on a physical, sexual note, don't understand it. When they get older, they be like damn I just sold myself to the devil.

Jack: A lot use their body to get ahead. Not everyone, but a lot of hood chicks.

After more prompting regarding the sex differential in valuing education, students begin to describe that black females value education more than black males. The students place a strong

emphasis on socially constructed ideas of femininity and masculinity when describing the different educational experiences. The following illustrates their perception:

Interviewer: Do you think young women value education more than men?

Arnold: Most. It depends where you live, the way you live. Some places, men want to get their education and vice versa. Regardless of what, they can still live their lives. If not going to school or not doing nothing... how do you get an apartment? It usually takes six months in a shelter, then can work. It can take a year sometime, males can be there for a year. For a male it's hard. For a woman it's easier, if have a baby. Life is about making money.

Interviewer: Do women have better verbal skills than men? Can women communicate better than young men?

Nick: They communicate with their body.

Jack: It's about the person themselves, who they hang around, how they mothers carry them selves. It's who they hang around, how they were raised.

Motivational forces (Peer & parental Influence)

Most students at Plain in the mixed group discuss their inspiration and most attribute their inspiration to their mother:

Interviewer: What is your greatest inspiration, motivation?

Tina: Mother.

Jay: Mother

Frank: Father

Tony: myself

Interviewer: Why do kids stay in school?

Lisa: Inspiration to go to school comes from the family, mother, father, aunts, uncles...

Students go on to explain that most people in their family had not received a high school or college diploma. They desired to break the cycle and be the first in their families to graduate. Their responses illustrate the value placed on education and refute the notion of black males not valuing an education as much as other groups:

Jay: Nobody in my household has a high school diploma, let alone a college degree.

Most students attributed their source of motivation to their mother, where females lead the households most likely due to the large amount of black males incarcerated or estranged. Only 60 students out of 151 students who completed the social demography instrument in the study lived with both parents. Eighty students lived with one parent, and 10 lived with neither parent.

To quote Ricky's earlier comments, Ricky a freshman at Cascade who has the luxury of living with both parents said: *My father and my mother sat down and told me that you need school to succeed and do things in life.*

JR a junior at Cascade like Ricky credits his home life.

Jr said: Basically my parents. I see where they're at and their struggles. They were raising two children through their teenage years. I see where they're at and I'm just trying to beat the odds and be better than them.

Tim also a junior but unlike JR and Ricky did not have both parents. He had a male influence, which is needed for more black males.

Tim said: My uncle. He's like a father to me because my father wasn't around. He helps me get through school. He wants me to make better choices than him and my father made.

Positive role models / Parental involvement

Students primarily cite parental involvement as beneficial to their learning. Parents who encourage their children to do well in school and have high expectations for them help impart social capital. Luis cites his mother and godmother as sources of motivation; he also describes his father's involvement in the penal system as a means of motivation.

Interviewer to the freshmen focus group at Cascade asked: *Ok, what about you? Who motivates you?*

Luis: My mom and my godmother because my godmother she's also a teacher at MS 301 in the Bronx, she teaches special needs students, English, Math, so she motivates me a lot to go to school and do right. And my mom also too cuz they are always telling me they don't want me to be like my dad. So, that's the main motivation.

Interviewer: They don't want you to be like your dad, what do you mean?

Luis: Like, my dad, growing up for him was a rough time, you know. He's been to prison. He's out now and he's doing the right thing but she says she don't want me to go down that path. She wants me to do twice as better than that. She wants to see me successful in life. Sittin' on millions

and having the house and my own business to focus on.

Many students consumed in the media and hip-hop culture share Luis's desire for material gratification. In fact, most carry the middle class American dream of a home and no real financial worries, as this nation was founded on the principles of opportunities and success. Many black males like Luis desire to be a rapper or basketball star seeking an ideal version of success.

Interviewer: What about you? You see yourself going to college?

Tim: I myself have no choice in it, it's my mother who decides.

Interviewer: She said you're going to college?

Luis: Yeah, she said I'm going to college."

Students at Atlantic Academy who were the only group to come to the college for the focus group also expressed that their interest in higher education came from their family, mainly their mother:

Interviewer: You were saying that this is the first time that you've been in a college. Right? Talk about your experience here at the college (John Jay), visiting...

Steve: My youngest sister is 16. She goes to school. My younger brother doesn't attend school that much. He was doing good; he was on the football team, then he stopped.

Like Steve, other black males have not visited college or sincerely thought they could or wanted to attend. More efforts should be made to expose younger students from the ninth grade about college opportunities.

Have you ever thought about going to college?

Yes, my mother tells me... I am going to do it for me and my mother also.

Rob, another member of the focus group attributed his motivation as internal. Because of family problems, he used that as a means for motivation. Other students attributed motivation to positive peer and family influence.

Rob: I respect that but you can't do everything for your family, you gotta do it for yourself. I am going through a little issue right now. My father's in jail. He wants me to do well. I want to support my father, but I can't support him if I can't support myself.

Interviewer: Who in here has had friends go to college or wants to go to college?

Joe: I want to go here to John Jay. I have a friend who wants to be the chief of police.

Students attributed much of their desire for an education to their parents, mainly the mother. One student's response highlights the conditions that exist in a single-mother household and urban environment, where the result is a latch key child. It is well documented that a lack of supervision for many kids who return home from school to an empty house can result in adolescent mischief, boredom, loneliness, and fear (Riley & Steinberg, 2004). Although, some students may be harmed by the experience, others can thrive. The following student appears to be the latter:

Interviewer: How often do you see your mother or father?

Joe: Every morning, she wakes me up every morning. But I see her at night, when she comes home from work. Sometimes I cook for her. We have a good relationship, she is like my best friend.

Miguel attributed his motivation to his college-educated family and discussed the meaning of the word minority to him. His interpretation of the word, speaks to issues of colorism in America. He was the only Latino in the focus of all black males. He probably was surprised that he was chosen to be a part of the focus group. Traditionally Hispanics do not identify themselves as black, even if they quote on quote look black. This raises many concerns in a nation where color is a large identifier of who people are.

Although race is socially constructed, it has powerful meanings in societal relations and institutions. This young man did not like the negative connotation of the word minority. By

choosing to identify himself as Hispanic, he rejects the label. However, a Hispanic classification does not identify his race. One can be a black or white Hispanic. Nonetheless, this student explained his attitudes about education stemming from his family:

Miguel: I don't really see me as a minority, me being Hispanic, where someone is better than me. You can have knowledge. For me personally, both my people already graduated college. Both my sisters graduated...I'm the only boy, so I gotta do good.

Most of the students attributed their inspiration to their family. In doing so, they explained the many hurdles crossed by many impoverished, urban families. The following exchange highlights, the struggles many inner city families experience:

Joe: My mother's my rock, my mountain, if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be doing the things I am doing now. Yeah we grew up in the hood, I've been evicted, life problems. I do whatever it takes to get myself out of it. Ask why do I keep doing things like this. Most people think about their mothers. My mother keeps me going.

Some students explained that their family members and even their mother were pursuing a higher education. They identified this as a source of motivation:

Joe: I definitely have to say that I think about my mother and my two brothers. My older brother is going to college and my younger brother is in school. My mother is going to college. I look up to them.

Rob: Right now my mother is in college.

Interviewer: How does that feel? Do you help each other with assignments?

Rob: It's funny because she wants me to help her. She asks me to review her work. She be having like 17 page papers. I don't be feeling like it.

Interviewer: You should help her, that's your mother.

Jonathan explained that both his parents were pursuing postgraduate degrees. He was definitely the only member of the focus group to have both guardians working towards advanced degrees:

My mother is going to college to get her master's in psychology and my stepfather is getting his master's in something...I forgot.

Tim, in the freshmen focus group at Cascade, said:

There's one guy that I really admire; he's my uncle. He graduated from college and he's working on finding a better job and he still pushes me to go to school and even down to the people who dropped out of school and he's out there doing the bad thing, selling drugs or you know, being a gangsta. He still pushes me to go to school.

Tim's motivational sources come from an unconventional means in American society. His comments go against the general belief of drug dealers or gangsters not valuing education. The fact that his uncle received a college degree and was still involved in the informal market, selling drugs, illustrates the many difficulties black males have finding adequate employment, see Travis, 2005. The adversities encountered may erode their trust in the educational system and could be one of the reasons some black males do not put forth much in school.

Give me an example of him pushing you to go to school?

Like, Thursday and Friday we didn't have no school and he saw me outside and the first word he said was, 'Why aren't you in school?' And then I told him we didn't have no school, and he said, 'listen, go to school and get your education. I don't want to see you out here on the corner like I am.'

Interviewer speaking to the mixed focus group of students at North Academy:
What about you? Who motivates you? Where do your influences come from?

Jim: From both my parents and from people who fell.

What do you mean, people who fell?

Like if you see someone who's everyday on the corner doing nothing, that makes me want to go to college, makes me want to succeed.

Jim's comments suggest the informal market structure and the negative environment make him want to rise above adversity and become successful. Interviewer speaking to juniors at North Academy about the informal market and how drug dealers, despite the current misconceptions, encourage education and value it, asks the following:

So, you're saying that the drug dealers in your neighborhood motivate you to go to school?

Moe: Yes, they try. They talk to us. They try to talk to us. I mean a lot of people don't listen because our parents don't want us with them and things like that.

Give me an example of a drug dealer talking to you about school.

Moe: My uncle, who sells drugs. He sells drugs, everybody knows he sells drugs and he would tell me that this is not the right thing for you to be doing, if you need money, just ask me for the money. I wouldn't make you do anything for no money. I would rather you go to school and make money the correct way than for you to be selling drugs and getting knocked out here and spend half your teenage years in jail.

Defining success

Students at Central add what they believe success to be. Many of their comments describe the American dream of owning a home, a car, and having a nice job. Success for them is highly materialistic. Some even aspired for fame as many hope to become a basketball star, rapper or producer. Education was not mentioned as a means toward success, until the interviewer mentioned John Jay College. The correlation is not there for many.

*How do you define success? Accomplishment, high school, determination, set a goal
What does it look like?*

Terrance: Nice car house, family, people looking up to me, be on TV.

What do you have to have to be successful?

Bernie: People recognize me.

Justin: Money, fame and fortune.

Terrance: Chillin, not having to work hard.

Have any considered going to John Jay?

Ronny: It crossed my mind.

Interviewer: People in community- how would they see you if you went to John Jay?

Ronny: As if I'm trying to be a cop or lawyer- who be trying to put us down.

Terrance: Nah, you trying to get out the hood.

Ronny: Oh look at him, he going to John Jay; he's in the book.

Terrance: Peers may look down, but older people will tell you, you are doing the right thing.

What advice would you give providers- teachers to help you?

Listen to the students...need to know someone really understands. Be more down to earth. Don't be on a child's back too much. Show them you really care.

Students at Atlantic, another alternative school in the study described their varying attitudes toward education and success. The following captures their insights:

Interviewer: What does a college degree mean? Visualize success along with education.

Rob: It's the opposite. To see what you did, you dropped out and got yours (speaking to the interviewer who served time in prison and later received his doctorate).

Kevin: I grew up with a lot of money because of my father. I saw everything that he did. Now he has to do 10 years in jail. I don't want to be in jail while my kid is getting ready to graduate. I want to get an education.

Students in this focus group understood the importance of education but struggled putting their responses into words. Some questions they couldn't explain or give concrete examples to support their beliefs. Overall, their opinions correlated with staff regarding the family atmosphere, which will be discussed later.

Of the students in the focus groups at Atlantic, Plain, Cascade, MARSHALL High, North Academy, Central, of which quantitative data exists, grade point average was largely used as a marker for success. Students provided data on their socioeconomic status, school and home communities, but did not answer specific questions on the social demographic questionnaire regarding extracurricular activities (see appendix 9 for list of extracurricular activities by school).

Because extracurricular activities and access to resources are important, a chart was created based on all the schools in the study and the activities and community support that exist (see appendix 9). Additionally, in the focus groups many of the students at North Academy, Plain, and Cascade report being involved in school activities which range from sports, to internships, and

leadership positions in school. The following table shows the amount of students who attained academic success based on GPA, where 81 of the 151 students, 43 missing, had a 2.5 GPA or higher, and of the 81 students, only 21 had a 3.5 or higher:

Table 3: GPA Conversion Chart & Number of Students

Letter Grade	GPA	Frequency	Percent
A	4.0-3.5	21	13.9%
B	3.4-2.5	60	39.5%
C	2.4-1.5	25	16.8%
D	1.4-0.5	2	1.3%
F	0.4-0.0	0	0 %
Missing		43	28.5%
Total		151	100%

http://inquiry.princetonreview.com/leadgentemplate/GPA_popup.asp

Of the 108 students who reported their GPA, students at Cascade performed the best with a GPA of a 2.9 or higher, supporting the school administrator's report on the success of Cascade, although no public data is readily available. One student at Plain and one at North Academy reported the lowest GPA of a 1.0. Five out of six students, 83%, at Atlantic achieved the goal of a 2.5 or better, 10 of 12, 83%, at Plain, all 15, or 100%, at Cascade, six of 10, 60%, at MARSHALL High, 42 of 60, 70%, at North Academy, and three of five, 60%, at Central. There were a number of missing GPAs. Students' scores for the most part do not correlate with the ranking of the school, except for Cascade (see table 4 & appendix 8). For instance, Atlantic reports a higher level of academic success than their graduation rates show. This could be due to the amount of students surveyed, which consists of a purposeful group. Working in a high school, there is a level of gatekeeping that occurs, when certain administrators or school employees are asked to choose students to be part of research.

No one wants to display negative aspects of their school, hence certain students are usually chosen or sometimes certain students are selected because they are readily available. For instance,

most schools have students who are involved in leadership or extracurricular activities where adults are in constant contact with them, thus making it easier to utilize them opposed to seeking recruits. Nonetheless, the students' descriptions of their schools and home life provide enriched accounts to those concerned with improving and sustaining the quality of education to the nation's most at-risk group. Future research could be conducted without a purposeful sample, where every tenth name on a student roster is chosen to further enrich the literature.

Table 4

<u>Graduate Rates*</u>	
Plain	10.3
Atlantic	16.6
Central	30.6
Midway High	33.8
Southern	36.6
Wake Academy	73.8
Basin Academy	76.4
North Academy	87.1
Darwin Academy	89.7
Cascade	100

*Hudson, and Marshall are not listed. Hudson is an ATI and does not have graduation rates and MARSHALL is too new of a school to report rates.

Of the highest degree obtained by father, 78 of the 118 students report their fathers graduated from either high school, a four-year degree or graduate degree program. Forty-six students' fathers graduated high school, 23 received a bachelor's, and only nine a post graduate degree. Nineteen fathers had less than a high school diploma and 21 a GED or equivalent. For highest education obtained by mother, 96 of 127 have a high school diploma or higher, a much higher rate than fathers, which could be the result of large incarceration of black males or students not knowing information on their fathers. Forty-three received a high school diploma, 33 a four-

year degree, and 20 a post-graduate degree. Eleven of the students' mothers have less than a high school diploma and 20 a GED or equivalent.

Cross-tabulations of those who supplied information show the correlation between increased parental education and higher GPAs. For those whose mother received less than a high school degree, 3 out of 7, 42%, reached the GPA goal of 2.5 or higher and 9 of 14, 64%, of those whose mother received a GED or equivalent did. Twenty-six of 36, 72%, students whose mothers received a high school diploma reached the 2.5 or higher goal, 18 of 23, 78%, students whose mothers received a bachelor's did, and 16 of 17, 94%, whose mother received a master's or higher did (see table 5). Clearly, the higher the education in the household, the more social capital being imparted on the students, the more role models accessible, and possibly less financial stressors, such as evictions, lack of food, and clothes.

Table 5: High School GPA & Highest Educational Degree Obtained by Mother

		Highest educational degree obtained by mother					Total
		Less than High school	GED or equivalent	High school	4 year BA or BS	Masters, law, MD or PhD	less than High school
GPA	1.00	1	0	0	1	0	2
	1.50	0	0	1	0	0	1
	1.67	0	0	1	0	0	1
	1.80	0	0	1	2	1	4
	1.90	0	0	1	0	0	1
	2.00	3	2	4	2	0	11
	2.10	0	1	0	0	0	1
	2.30	0	0	1	0	0	1
	2.33	0	1	0	0	0	1
	2.40	0	1	0	0	0	1
	2.50	1	0	5	2	0	8
	2.67	0	0	3	3	1	7
	2.70	0	0	2	1	0	3
	2.80	1	1	0	1	1	4
	2.90	0	0	0	0	2	2
	3.00	1	4	7	4	5	21
	3.10	0	1	1	0	1	3
	3.20	0	0	0	0	1	1
	3.30	0	0	0	0	1	1
	3.40	0	0	0	2	1	3
	3.50	0	1	2	2	0	5
	3.60	0	1	1	0	0	2
	3.70	0	0	1	1	0	2
	3.80	0	1	0	0	1	2
	3.91	0	0	1	0	0	1
	4.00	0	0	3	2	2	7
Total		7	14	35	23	17	96

Regarding hours worked per week, 33 students reported working while in high school, while 118 did not. Students who did not work did better than those who did. Of which data is available, 17 of 25, 68% of those who worked reached the GPA goal of 2.5 or higher, while 75%, 64 of 85, of those who did not work reached the goal. Twenty-six males reported working while in school and 75 did not. Seven females reported working while 43 did not. No students at Atlantic report taking any AP classes, while eight at Plain, two at Cascade, two at MARSHALL High, and 18 at North Academy reported taking AP classes.

Ten students report being convicted of a felony, 140 report no conviction, while one student failed to answer. The former number does depict students who may have been charged with a felony of which charges were dismissed or those who had misdemeanor charges and or convictions. Students who attended Hudson, the ATI were all involved with the law but there was no quantitative data available, hence the real amount of students involved with the legal system is higher, which makes it 16 not 10 students. Ninety-nine parents rent their home and 39 own. Students who lived with their parents while growing up had higher GPA's, and those who lived with both parents performed even better in school, than their counterparts who lived with neither or one parent. Forty-one of the 58 students, 70%, who supplied information received a 2.5 GPA or better. Thirty-four of 43 students, 79%, who lived with both parents received a GPA of 2.5 or better, while only 5 of the 8, 62.5%, who lived with neither received a 2.5 or better. Only 109 students supplied information.

Those who classified themselves as Other, performed better in school, Latinos did not, and those who designated themselves as Caribbean performed about the same as African Americans even though more African Americans were included in the research, when using the 2.5 GPA goal. The exception to this was the students at Cascade: 13 African Americans, two Caribbean, one Latino, and two classified as Other all performed over 2.5. Forty-five of 60 African Americans reached the 2.5 or higher GPA goal, while 18 of 25 Caribbean, 11 of 17 Latino and all seven classified as Other reached the goal. The designation other most likely includes those born in Africa. It is unfortunate that other was not specified because it could have really influenced this research. If using the 3.0 GPA benchmark mark for academic success, Caribbean students outperformed black Americans, 52% to 48.3 %, and Others 85.6% to 48.3. Forty-seven percent of Latinos reached the 3.0 mark.

Fifty-three males were African American, 23 Caribbean, 15 Latino and eight other (see chart below). Twenty-nine females were African Americans, 12 Caribbean, 6 Latino, and 1 other. Nine of the 81 African Americans were 19 or older, no Caribbean of the total 35 were 19 or older, two of 21 Latinos were, and no one classified as other was 19 years of age.

Table 6: High school attended & Ethnic Background

		Ethnic background				Total
		African American	Caribbean /Non-Latino	Latino	other	African American
	Atlantic	4	1	6	1	12
	Plain Academy	11	2	1	1	15
	Cascade	13	2	1	2	18
	MARSHALL High	4	2	3	1	10
	North Academy	45	28	8	4	85
	Central	4	0	1	0	5
	Other	1	0	1	0	2
Total		82	35	21	9	147

Caribbean students' fathers had the highest amount of fathers who had a GED or higher with a whopping 92% (see Tables 7 & 8). Eighty-eight percent of African Americans had fathers with a GED or higher, 70% of Latinos, and 62% of others had fathers with a GED or higher. For students' mothers who received a GED or higher, the results are different. Caribbean students do not lead with 89%, because 98.5% of African American students' mothers have a GED or higher, which coincides with reports of black males becoming involved in the penal system and women outnumbering men in post high school plans. Other possible reasons include the large amount of African Americans included in the research, which could skew the results. Seventy percent of Latinos' mothers received a GED or higher.

Table 7: Highest Educational Degree Obtained by Father & Ethnic Origin

							Total
		less than High school	GED or equivalent	High school	4 year BA or BS	Masters, law, MD or PhD	
	African American	7	11	32	10	3	63
	Caribbean/Non-Latino	2	5	6	10	2	25
	Latino	6	4	7	1	2	20
	Other	3	1	1	1	2	8
Total		18	21	46	22	9	116

Table 8: Highest Educational Degree Obtained by Mother & Ethnic Origin

							Total
		less than High school	GED or equivalent	High school	4 year BA or BS	Masters, law, MD or PhD	
	African American	1	11	24	19	12	67
	Caribbean/Non-Latino	3	3	8	9	5	28
	Latino	6	5	6	2	1	20
	Other	0	1	3	2	2	8
Total		10	20	41	32	20	123

Positive role models / peers

Although in the literature and in some of the focus groups peer pressure is documented as having a negative affect on the educational process, some of the students in this focus group explained how peer pressure impacted them positively. Cascade students point to each other as motivational forces. They enjoy being in an all boy's school where there is no distraction from girls and other students take academics seriously.

Interviewer: When did you realize you can be a good student?

Alvin: Around the 6th grade.

Before then did you feel differently about school?

I felt like there was no point but still I went and tried because of the people that I chose to put in my circle and surround me. So I chose certain people to put in my personal circle, which will

motivate me. Why can they be good in something and I can't? We all have the same abilities, there's nothing wrong with any of us, you have the same abilities to do anything we want.

Interviewer: Do you all feel empowered?

Alex: Yes

Interviewer: Why?

Alex: I am with people my age trying to do a positive thing...something that does not happen in their rooms (other schools).

Barriers to educational success: Lack of parental involvement

Cascade freshmen continue to discuss the importance that parental influence has on a child. Students cite apathetic parents as a barrier to achievement for some inner city students.

Tom: Or some of the kids who cut school, some of the kids who don't go to school it's either for a reason like they're sick or you just have some parents who tell their kids to stay home on certain days.

Why? Why would they tell them to stay home?

You got some parents who just don't care, who are cold hearted.

What do you mean?

You got parents who would treat their kid like they would treat their enemies. Like they would treat somebody that they don't know and it's not supposed to go like that. I feel if you're a parent and you got a child you should encourage your child, give your child props when he do right. Be there for your child, take care. And you have some parents who just don't care. They'll come home and be like, "Where he at?" He outside with all of 'em. He'll come up whenever he wants to. You got some parents who just don't care.

Luis: In the morning, I'm out early in the morning for various reasons of running or practicing. I see the same kids in my grade level but they're outside in front of the buildings or on the corners for various reasons as maybe things that's illegal or hanging around people that's doing things illegal. I see these things because when I leave in the morning to be outside early in the morning while I'm doing something positive, I see them. When I come home, I see them. At night when I go to the store for my grandmother, I see them. They're in the same spot, which means they have to be doing something not right. Cuz if I'm running around going to school running errands and things, why can't they do the same thing. It's just certain people, they're just lazy and they take life for granted.

Luis and Tom discuss the effects weak familial and communal networks can have on children. There is a notion of instant gratification that exists for some inner city students. Tom and

Luis words highlight the importance of creating strong schools and communal programs for the nation's most at risk students. Eradicating social ills will most likely never occur, for capitalism needs a lower class to thrive, yet programs can rid neighborhoods of violence because the same capitalist needs a measure of safety when shopping at stores or walking to his or her car.

Historical circumstances speak to issues of involuntary vs. voluntary immigration, Cultural Differences, and Demographic Differences

Some of the students in this mixed grade and gender focus group at North Academy discussed the impact of historical circumstances such as involuntary versus voluntary immigration, cultural and demographic differences on educational experiences of black males (Ogbu, 2003. Many foreign born blacks regard black Americans as lazy, which is a common misconception. This thought process negates the differing societies and culture. A foreign-born black is not a minority in his/her country and hence sees more black police officers, judges, lawyers, and bankers; ultimately, a foreign born black sees more positive role models who resemble him or her. Black American culture is largely referred to as the other, inferior to white culture.

Although white culture is superior in the Caribbean and many African nations, where skin-bleaching cream is a hot selling commodity, they are not the minority in the country. This differing inception creates an entirely different dynamic for foreign and native born blacks in America. The students in this research identified their ethnicities as African American (53 males, 29 females), Caribbean-Non Latino (23 males, 12 females), Latino (15 males, 6 females) or Other (8 males, 1 female); the research did not specify second generation blacks, which could have impacted the findings. Second generation blacks usually still have the cultures and values from the parents' countries. A large number of students only identified their ethnicity, but neglected to state if they were born outside of America. Twenty-five students out of 151 answered the question; five students stated that they were born outside of the United States, four males and one female, and 15

males and five females, said they were not born outside of the country. For country born in, only one male identified Haiti, and two Guyana, while one female mentioned Guyana.

Nonetheless, research supports the contention that foreign born blacks do better academically than native born blacks (see Massey, et. al, 2007; Ogbu, 2003). In the following exchange, the interviewer discussed the disaggregating of race and asked students for their perception of black males and academic success:

Interviewer: What ethnic group of blacks do you find are at the bottom of the socio-economic group?

Lisa: Urban African Americans. See West Indies come in with certain disciplinary values-more focused, don't play around when it comes to school.

Interviewer: Why?

Justin: The way that they are raised.

Another student added to the discussion regarding the impact of cultural differences:

Richard: Basically the Caribbean values, different structure, more discipline. African Americans don't have the same values.

Interviewer: Poverty in Jamaica- what's the difference?

Richard: It's the conditions in which you live. You come to America to get a better life, because you want to elevate yourself and family who are still impoverished. A daily struggle in order to survive.

Interviewer: Is it possible to make it? I spent a lot of time in prison and yeah you can make it out.

Justin: I use my father as an example from Barbados, very poor and now has his own business.

Interviewer: Why can't African Americans do that? Why didn't my father do that?

Richard: We've been given a lot already, blacks think people owe us. Think someone else is going to give it to us, think people owe us for slavery.

In addition to cultural differences amongst blacks, some of the students felt that African Americans do not do as well in school because they lack positive role models and motivation:

Leo: Don't have no one around, just forget about school- no one pushing them, they can do whatever they want; it's a vicious cycle.

Another student added:

Josh: Blacks don't see the struggle, 10-20 years ago, civil rights movement more blacks pushing, don't see the struggle again.

Students attributed their motivation to the culture of their school:

Interviewer: What about you, all who want to collect data (students mentioned conducting social science research to find out why black males are not attending class)? What's different? Is it the school, your teacher?

Josh: Yes.

Interviewer: You also had to have drive; so what did it?

Josh: If you don't have positive role models, not going to want to achieve or do better.

School community's involvement

Tom, the freshman at Cascade, explained the support that he receives from his teachers and coach is very helpful and is a source of motivation.

He said: I'm being prepared for college not only educational, but as an athlete too. Sometimes I have practice at 6 until 9 and I'm tired when I go home and then do an hour and a half of work. My coach and my teachers are really helping me get focused cuz I'm trying to make it somewhere in life, not only as an athlete, but a student too.

A Plain faculty member confirms the importance of school support.

He said: There's a statistic that they used to tell at my old job which is, if a student is connected to two or more staff members, that they are not only more successful in the program but they were more successful after the program. It really just comes down to that basic need to be loved and accepted. When people just connect and care about, how was your night last night, that makes such a difference on how they approach school and coming to school and in the classroom, that's really undervalued.

The connection?

Yes.

Community valuing education

In the mixed group at Plain, the following student explained how many in his neighborhood struggle with the concept of education. The students describe how difficult it is to

retain employment if they have a prison record. Others explain that in a shaky economy, a high school diploma is no surety. The following illustrates the struggle occurring in his community:

Tony: Some feel like, why go to school when I can make quick money (drugs).

Jay: A high school diploma used to mean something, now it is considered nothing.

Tony: How can I get a job when I'm a felon.

Jim: Yeah, that's how they feel. I know people who got high school diplomas and they sell drugs. Why go to school, why finish going to school when I can make 16 thousand a week?

Frank: I used to get teased because I used to read books a lot and never used to go outside, so they'd call me a nerd. My motivation to stay in school came from my mother who was struggling. I kept on reading my book and they still stupid, they hanging on the street, I'm in school, I'm getting something out of my life.

Students at Central describe the community in which they reside. Educators are sometimes unaware or forget that school does not take precedence for individuals who have constant struggles and violence in their lives.

Bernie: We come from poor neighborhoods...from the hood with gangs, drugs.

No one in the focus group lived in a drug or gang free community.

Have you seen violence?

Terrance: I've seen people murdered before. At a party, someone shot a gun in the air and the police came and shot the guy and picked him up.

Bernie: I saw a guy with a knife and gun.

Justin: I saw a man get shot in the face over a girl, a stupid fight.

Members of the mixed aged level focus group of six male students at Hudson explained their community's views on education ranged by age where the older members of the community recognized the value of an education, while the younger ones didn't:

Interviewer: Do people in your community value education?

Arnold: Parents yes, the kids my age no. they value making money, looking good, clothes, everything gotta be up there, sneakers, everything gotta be fresh.

Interviewer: What are their ages?

Arnold: Age 14, even younger than that, all they care about is making money, they are ignorant...don't care about school, make money any way.

Interviewer: Where do they receive that message?

Jack: Messages come from people who are older than them, culture.

Another student disagrees but similarly attributes less value on education to street culture:

Nick: Not really culture, but role models of those on the street, wanna be like them. Some wanna be on the block, chillin, be with girls. Others see fresh pair of sneakers and like them. Money talks.

Students discuss how the fast lifestyle got them nowhere quickly. The following exchange

highlights their experiences resulting in positive change for these young men:

Jack: We didn't realize all of this. We finally know where we are headed. How you gonna get that stuff if you're on the block? They're gonna get locked up, nobody's telling them. Ya'll telling us.

Nick: A lot of us didn't care.

Jack: Care about what everyone else thinks.

Students at Atlantic described their communities' views on education. Students confirmed Mr. Jones description of repeat offenders. According to the students, many youngsters were engaged in negative behavior or were incarcerated:

Interviewer: Tell me about the people on your block, are they in school?

Jim: About three people on my block go to school, a lot of my people are locked up. I keep my distance from all that.

In the following exchange, students discuss hustlers in their community supporting education. This finding is profound because it rejects the traditional notion of black males not valuing education like other groups:

Interviewer: How do they treat you when you go to school? Do they treat you differently?

Rob: That's funny, because they encourage me to go to school, even though they're not going to school themselves.

Interviewer: Give me an example of someone encouraging you to go to school.

Rob: Stay in school, don't do what I do. It really doesn't make any sense to me.

Interviewer: Why, what's wrong with that?

Miguel: Well I understand they're trying to help me, but like Jimmy (referencing a discussion off tape) said earlier, you can't help me if you can't help yourself. You doing something that you know that's wrong.

Rob: Not necessarily, they probably want to do it, but can't do it. So they are looking out for the next person so they don't end up in the same situation. It's probably too late for them to catch up so they just look down on the next person to try to help them get further than where they got.

Students expressed their views on success and the need for an education. For most success was materialized, which is not surprising, in capitalist America. The following dialogue illustrates that most understood education provided vital options:

Interviewer: What does education represent in your community?

Jim: Success, get what you need to get it.

Interviewer: Anyone else?

Miguel: Education in most families, means money, money.

Interviewer: How many people have benefited in your community from going to school? What are the benefits?

Miguel: I see education as like options, results in choices, options.

Steve: Not too many people in my community go to school, but if they see me, they tell me to go. Education gives you choices.

Interviewer: The literature says the community does not encourage school and call you a punk if you do, but I am hearing the opposite here. Anyone want to talk about this?

Jim: Well everyone here living in the hood...education seen as a way out. Want to get out of this situation. They say don't end up like me.

Interviewer: Can you think of anyone on your block that goes to college?

Random yeses.

Interviewer: So out of the [6] of you in here, only three people know someone who has gone to college?

Miguel: Not from my block but from my school WA (referencing one of the schools the field researcher visited and confirms the researcher's findings), pretty much everyone that I know there goes to school.

Interviewer talking to the juniors at Cascade: How do the younger people in your community feel about education?

Lucas: I live upstate in Rockland, but to commute to school I stay in the Bronx with my grandparents. I'm a person that grew up in the suburbs but can also relate to the city environment. The standards of living are high up there so education is important.

Calvin: They be on the block and all they be talking about is clothes and girls and when I say I'm going to get a book they be laughing and call me a schoolboy. I tell them I'm going to do my homework and they look at me like I'm crazy.

Rich: My environment they don't really stress school. They skip school and hang out on the block and sell drugs. The percentage of people going to college is not good. (Cascade Juniors)

The first student makes reference to the suburbs, where there is a higher standard of living, and more professionals than in impoverished urban areas. Lucas's statement about living in the Bronx implies that education is not as important in his grandparents' neighborhood. There is a different struggle in some urban communities, making it difficult for a parent to focus on education if the location of the next meal or paying the rent takes precedence. The mixed level focus group and a senior at Plain agree with students at Cascade. Jim and Tony explain the concept of making money quickly, sometimes called instant gratification but for many people who live in impoverished communities is survival.

Jim: Some of them feel like, why go to school when I can make quick money (drugs).

Jack: On my block, there is only one kid who graduated high school, out of about twenty to thirty kids. (Plain Seniors)

Vaughn, a junior at MARSHALL High, adds his critique to the plight of black males, notion of peer pressure, and teen dating:

You see everybody else getting all the girls because they have money and that's only because of their parents, you don't know what they doing in that house to get all that money. Then you're like, I wanna be like that too, you go start selling drugs, you get all the money, now you getting girls.

Interviewer: So, there's a relationship between selling drugs, to get the money, to get the girl?

Yeah. (MARSHALL High Juniors)

Black males' perception of education & success

In the following exchange between the interviewer and male students at Central, students describe their perceptions of education. Ronny's description of possibly being the first in his family to go to college is profound. His comments are supported by national data where black males on average graduate at lower rates than other groups of students. :

Interviewer: Do you know of black men that you've gone to school with that graduated and have gone to college?

Ronny: No, if I do, I'll be the first. I'll be a role model to my younger sisters and brothers.

Terrance: In the hood, they don't go to college- they say college ain't for me.

Do they question their ability to be successful?

Terrance: Yes, people want money now not later. If you see someone going to school everyday, he ain't got nothing, while you see the other standing on the block fly- you got something.

Terrance speaks of instant gratification and survival preoccupying the minds of many black youth.

The students at Central discussed how this phenomenon pervades the minds of black students.

Bernie: Blacks get low paying jobs- many don't think they need to go to college.

Bernie's statement lends credence to the plight that blacks have endured historically in schools and the job market. The constant struggle to make ends meet in life can lower one's self-esteem. Many people forget that the Civil Rights struggle occurred in the 1960's, less than 50 years ago.

How many [blacks] have you known... [go] on to prison?

Justin: I went to jail myself, I got released got a chance to go to school. If 10 of us, I would say 40%.

Bernie then discusses the many problems that exist in impoverished communities, which take the forefront over school.

Bernie:: Being black means living in the jungle everyday, baby mother's dropping out of school (pregnant women), being harassed by the cops.

Terrance in response to being asked if black males value education, said:
No black men do not value education like other men. As soon as they get out of high school, they want to make money.

Justin: They know they have knowledge, but want fast money- don't use knowledge.

Ronny: I heard before if you want to hide something from a black man, put it in a book.

Justin: Not anymore, we had everything handed to us. We don't want it as much, back then we had to work hard for it.

Ronny explained why he had not been so focused during high school:

He said: I was a geek in middle school and was all about the books, then high school changed me. Puberty happened, girls, hangin' with the wrong crowds, I was smoking weed, drinking, and partying.

Bernie: I went to three high schools -T, NB, and Central...I got there and had to make a name for myself. I was new to school, a freshman.

Students at Central continued to talk about their educational experiences and discussed if they felt they were ready for college. Some believed they were not prepared, most likely due to earlier educational experiences in traditional public schools.

Interviewer: How many plan on going to college?

Some say yes and others no. They don't see negative policy implications such as separate but equal that has continued to influence their learning. Although Brown v. Board aimed to make education equitable, many of the inner city schools remain segregated; have fewer resources, and less qualified teachers. Additionally, if the school is integrated, the classes are segregated, with

more whites in college bound and honors courses. Functionalists would contend that agency or action causes the educational stratification. Still yet, the sole reason for stratification is not agency. Students from impoverished backgrounds do not start on the same footing as wealthy or middle class students who are taught social capital and have access to more professionals. Lack of preparation, less or no access to tutors, and issues in the home and community life cannot be discounted as influences.

Interviewer: What does being prepared looked like?

Terrance: I am getting ready to graduate.

Ronny: I feel that I've been prepared to go to school. It comes from junior high school.

Bernie: I'm not prepared. I put it on myself and I don't know what preparation for college looks like.

Justin: Discipline, knowing when to study comes from the home.

Terrance: I take responsibility for not being prepared.

Students' comments at Atlantic rejected the traditional literature that says black males value education less:

Interviewer: Do you think young men of color value education less?

Steve: I value education, because in order to live comfortable and be established I gotta get it.

Rob: I have to say that education is my foundation. It's important, I want to do things.

Joe: Education not only to me but to my family is very important. Before my grandfather passed always used to tell me you can't get no where with out an education, you can't be a man or provide for your family without one. My mother had me when she was young, she messed up in school, by having me. She put herself back in school. She knew what she had to do to succeed and take care of me. So that's part of it too. All her hard work to put me to school, I know it would hurt her if I didn't do good in school or go to college.

Students gave varied reasons as to why they valued education. One of the main reasons given by most was the availability of options and someone in their family explaining the importance of an education. Students desired to leave impoverished backgrounds and many

resisted the illegitimate markets in exchange for a formal degree. The following exchange illustrates the struggle that many students face as they aim for a higher education:

Interviewer: Do any of you have to fight the temptation from the black market or illegitimate ways?

All: Laughter

Jim: Well people in my hood think of money. The reason I value education cuz I know you can't live in the illegitimate market forever. In order to get a good job, you need an education. Even to work for McDonalds you need a high school diploma.

Interviewer: Do you think education provides you all with options?

All: Yes.

Students in the mixed group at North Academy when trying to assess the plight of black males questioned if black males value education. Some spoke of black males' perception in the black community, others spoke of instant gratification and the need to survive:

Interviewer: Why are there fewer black men in college?

Jim: Some see school as a waste of time, scared to ask for help, some are lazy.

Interviewer: Give an example of them being lazy.

Jim: A friend feels trapped, doesn't want to do anything, afraid cop will stop him or somebody trying to kill him.

Jim's explanation of lazy doesn't completely describe a lazy person. His description is one of fright or limitations placed upon one in society. His portrayal of his friend denotes racism and poverty, not idleness.

Interviewer: What's the percentage of the people you know in your community in jail or school?

Jim: Seventy percent of those my age not in school, I would say due to stupidity.

The low percentage of students who remain in school may not simply be due to 'stupidness' as Jim described but it may be a lack of work ethic, some laziness as mentioned, or the

inability to request or accept help. This is seen in the high school in which I'm employed from most students. Students of color, mainly males, do not readily ask for help. As Jim mentioned, it may be due to being afraid to request assistance. Tim agreed that black males are not putting forth their best effort in the educational process, but also added that some hustle to survive:

Tim: Can't give you a percentage...some don't go, but hustle, try to make a living and there are some that don't go to school...just hang out.

Tonya: Those who don't go to school are in gangs, someone else's house smoking.

Tim spoke of internalized racism and burden of Acting white purported by Ogbu, 2003:

Tim: Some scared of success, being looked as acting white, like speaking properly. Then they'll think you are better.

Interviewer: What is acting black?

Tonya: It's a mentality, stereotype, clothes they wear...it's all about stereotypes.

Presence of Gangs in Schools (Atlantic)

Students spoke of the dangers of gang involvement and living in impoverished, violent communities. Steve described one instance where a young man struggling with the dangers committed suicide. The following dialogue illustrates the struggles that occur in many inner city neighborhoods:

Steve: I think that lil kid who killed himself was scared, scared to be killed by someone else's bullet. He killed himself that's crazy. He was probably afraid of being killed. He didn't want to get killed by someone else's bullet. Instead he killed himself.

Joe: I understand where he's coming from though. At some time you get sick and tired of this shit. You be like damn what did I do to deserve to go through this shit.

Steve: You still have something you can do in this world instead of just killing yourself.

The interviewer explained that traditional literature claims gang members reject education; this research does not support that position. The students provided vivid accounts that refute early research.

Interviewer: Literature says that gang members reject traditional education, doing some research at John Jay we found some current and former members of street gangs that challenged the literature...At Atlantic, is that apparent?

Mikey: You wouldn't know unless you see certain handshakes or symbols...those people are not true to themselves. If that's not their lifestyle, why be fake.

Kevin: I kind of disagree...it's not necessarily being false. It's like your family...family is in...some grow up around it.

Joe: Sometimes you are born into the life you don't have an option...one of my friends his mother and father are bloods... he was born into a gang. He just finished high school.

Mikey: They are false claiming, not really in the gang... they see people getting money, wanna be down. There are different sets of gang members. It's not really about the gang. Money, people will do anything for money.

Kevin: Like you were saying there are gangs at Atlantic, they are not disrupting our education. Every gang member is not a negative person. A couple of years ago, I used to be a Latin King. The leader of my tribe, he actually got a master's degree in philosophy. It's funny, right? It's crazy. Now look, the way he went about leaving the tribe, he got jobs for everybody. He went up to the school and made sure everyone did what they had to do. If someone got arrested, he got him out. He was like their parent.

Mikey: Also these people go to school and are in a gang. If you want to be in a gang and act hood, there's a place for that. There's a place for everything. Gotta code switch... when you are in school, you gotta learn, can't mix everything up.

One student discusses his perception of gang involvement and how a gang member's affiliation is known. In the following exchange, the students discuss the impact of gang affiliation and their attitudes regarding the young man who chose death over continued gang membership:

Interviewer: He said, he's not blood, but you say he is blood? Why do you say that?

Joe: Because you could see it in his face, he looks away when he says yeah fuck all that gang shit yeah...he's probably the older brother and he wants his little brother to be a part of the gang. And his little brother killed himself...he's the oldest out of all of them. And then he still put red roses at his brother's funeral. Nah he could of put white roses, everything is red, he's blood. His sneakers, his truck and then at the end you see he said peace my brother.

Interviewer: That's blood. Somebody else want to speak on this...First reaction to this piece. I mean this is about suicide. Right. There is another piece in there.

Steve: I think it's sad because to get away from that problem you don't have to commit suicide. There are other ways around it. It's hard but there are other ways around it. Without options or hope, possibility might become blood.

Students' description of the young man who committed suicide and the issues of gangs in their neighborhoods shed light on their reality. Many of the most at risk students live in environments plagued with violence.

Opinions on code switching

Attitudes on code switching and ability to do so varied tremendously among the focus group members at Atlantic. The staff member being older than most of the students explained the importance of code switching, although many students most likely due to youth did not agree.

Interviewer: Talk about code switching. The importance of being able to code switch, good and bad and what the Atlantic Academy does to get people to understand this.

George (staff): In my own words, I think you should first assess your surroundings. If you are going to a particular place, you should take into consideration where you are going. Take for example, the work force. Some companies are more conservative than others, i.e. Ernst & Young or education is less conservative. You should know the type of place. I think code switching is real important for the young people that I work with. They already have certain things against them. Their color, their nationality, so to speak. So they have to look a little better, be a little better, with their presentation.

Rob: I would feel uncomfortable if I was dressed differently.

Interviewer: Well look at me with my jacket on. Do I look different?

Mikey: I would think you were a preacher or something.

Interviewer: Praise the lord (laughter)...

Kevin: You see in my hood no one really dresses like that.

Interviewer: What would you think?

Steve: A lot of teachers don't see that us young men are smart enough to know our environment. I could be uptown and then go to a job interview and know to wear something different. They don't see that we have enough intellect to understand a time and place for everything.

Interviewer: So do you recognize, have you acknowledged that when you dress a certain way, you are treated differently by teachers than if you're dressed another way? Do you feel teachers are afraid of you if you dress a certain way?

Rob: At Atlantic they treat you like you adults. We can wear hats, do-rags. The way that I dress I don't think it affects my ability to learn. It has no effect on your learning.

Joe: The teachers don't treat you different. They don't understand how you spend \$500 on one outfit. In my Atlantic campus, Midtown one, you can't wear hats in the building.

George (staff): Umm I personally don't like to see the young men wearing do-rags in the building. I am concerned with how they handle themselves when they leave the building. I saw one man who graduated go on a job interview dressed inappropriately. He looked like he was still in high school. So I think we need to fix this. I can't say it interferes with their learning but it interferes with my thought process.

Stereotypical thoughts on black males (Atlantic)

Students described gentrification and the impact that has on them. One student discusses increased interactions with whites in his neighborhood. His comments illustrate the stigma that many black males receive in society.

Steve: At night. In my neighborhood a lot of white people moved in, Caucasian. If you get on the train late at night, they gonna think something. If I get on a train, a white lady moves her seat real quick.

Interviewer: So you get on a train, is this when you sit next to a woman?

Steve: No not every woman. I can get on a train and sit next to a black woman and she would just sit regular next to me. So it changes. The way I look, intimidation.

Interviewer: Where does that come from?

Mikey: From T.V.

George, the staff member, in the focus group discussed how the stereotypical thoughts about black males may stem from their behavior and culture, style of dress. He also described how certain situations can cause one to be afraid:

George (staff): When I see young men walking, I feel safe with these guys, I know them if they have their do-rag on or their hoodie. But I was in the park one night, going to my car, there was a bunch of teenagers walking. I looked over, there were about four of them...I couldn't see their faces...was like oh they gonna try to jack me for my car. So I looked around. So right away the fear of the

unknown I can't see your face....don't know what you're thinking. I am also aware of the self-hatred. We sometimes rob ourselves before we rob someone who looks different.

Interviewer: When I go home, I make sure my doors are locked. Does it mean I am a punk?

All: No

Interviewer: What am I responding to?

Rob: Your situation.

Steve reports that he uses the stereotypical thoughts as an advantage. Although he probably does not appreciate the negative connotations given to black males, he does not allow it to hinder his movement:

Steve: When on the train, I walk towards white people. I know they gonna get scared. They get up and I get their seat.

Everyone: laughs

Rob: I know he just made a joke but I want to say what he just said. [It's so true].

Instant gratification

Students discuss how instant gratification, e.g. the desire for quick money, can impede upon academic success. The following student at North Academy in the mixed group discussed how the strong desire for money prevented many black males from staying in school:

John: A lot want fast money and uh gangs violence.

Another discussed how instant gratification hinders academic success.

Ron: Umm...can make a quick \$1,000 out of school.

The following discussion with Jim at Hudson describes how instant gratification can hinder academic success:

Interviewer: I've been hearing a lot of young men saying they want to be a pimp, in songs... and young girls must be saying want to be a hoe. Where is that coming from?

Jim: I'll take it from those who wanna make money. I've done stuff in the past with them. It's easy money, don't want to get a job, lazy. (Hudson)

Cascade students' perceptions of black males valuing education varied. Some believed black youth get caught up in the hype of hip-hop culture and desire fancy clothes. Although this is one perception, other causes for desiring new sneakers could be due to poverty and avoidance or shame. No one wants to be poor, hence if new sneakers could be obtained, teasing and the shame of poverty can be avoided. This is why many wealthy students and people casually wear old sneakers and clothes. These individuals have nothing to prove; they have money. Other possible reasons for being overly consumed with hip-hop culture and underachievement could be the lack of structure and the delay of gratification.

Alex, the sophomore at Cascade, said: It's sad but you can't help what you're doing at that age, I mean, if you walking around and you seeing everybody with new Jordans and new Nikes and new jackets and you feel like you're going to school, you've been getting good grades but your parents just don't have the money to get you the things that others that don't deserve it have. So you feel like why am I doing this when I can go out and do what the other kids are doing because they're getting more than me and I'm doing the right thing so they turn to selling their bodies and selling drugs to get material things instead of getting their mind straight. (Cascade Sophomores)

Lucas: I feel like I get some instant gratification from school and a lot of people look at it as an investment. They need to see the gratification now. The value of education is less if you come from a street environment where people make fast money. (Cascade Juniors)

Jerry and Lance, seniors at Plain, described how fast money and lack of structure at home can lead to negative habits.

Jerry: Majority of the time with the kids who don't go to school, there ain't no time limit for them to wake up. They can get up whatever time they want, go to the street, hustle and make most of the time where somebody who stays in school, all these years in school, to make in that one little week or two weeks, they could make that in a day or two, and they feel it's easier for them to make money. They don't have to go to school, they look at it like, their life is set. At a time, when they're hustling, they get the money to buy what they want, as long as you get that dollar.

Interviewer: Why do they choose to do that (sell drugs), then going to school?

Jerry: It's easier, a lot easier. You wake up whenever you want.

Lance: You hit the streets, before you hit the school.

Russell: You step outside, money's right there. It's not like you have to go far. Older kats put them

onto it. (Plain Seniors)

Impact race plays in school

Racism in society has been evident since the creation of this nation; it later was extended to the institutions such as schools. The legacy of Brown v. Board of Education continues to haunt the country's schools (Kozol, 2005). It is well documented that children of color are recipients of racism, tracking and lower teacher expectations (Civil Rights Project Harvard University, 2008; Holzman & Hyman, 2007; Ogletree, Jr., 2007; Eaton & McArdle, 2007; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Clark & O'Donnell, 1999; Holman, 2004; MacCleod, 1995). When adding inner city, impoverished students to the equation, the effects are more than doubled. The following all male mixed grade level students at Central High, an alternative school, discussed the impact of racism on the psyche:

Interviewer: Have you experienced racism?

Terrance: I had a white teacher call me a nigger.

Why?

Terrance: I called him a spic and he called me a nigger. I punched him and got kicked out.

Interviewer: Do you find black History missing from curriculum?

*Bernie: Ummm huh (nods his head yes).
How does that make you feel?*

Bernie: It makes me feel like they don't care about me or like the government's covering up what's going on. The school is helping the government cover it up.

Students at Hudson discuss the effect colorism has on them. The Willie Lynch speech describes colorism best. Lynch, a former slave owner, proposed dividing and conquering of the black race. His speech to other slave owners encouraged separating the races, pitting the light skin against the dark skin slave, the old slave against the young and vice versa. Although there has been controversy regarding the actual occurrence of this speech, the words are quite powerful:

Jack: I grew up fighting because I have light skin.

Interviewer: What about black Puerto Ricans?

Interviewer on colorism: Have you encountered discrimination within the black race- based on being light and dark skinned?

Justin: A light skinned student is treated better by teachers. A Spanish girl would most likely talk to a Spanish guy.

Bernie: Skin color can help you advance in the job market.

The mixed group at North Academy comments on how internalized racism can affect an individual. Jim discusses how the school to prison pipeline makes many black males see prison or jail as a rite of passage. His statement is not surprising considering the alarming numbers of incarcerated black males:

John: They feel they don't have the same opportunity as others because they are black.

Jim: Blacks glorify street hip-hop way of life and identify with going to prison.

Interviewer speaking to students at Hudson:

Any of you ever been a victim of racism in school, give a specific example?

Arnold: Football team- white kid got on the team and his pop wrote a check just like my pop.

Interviewer: How do you know it was racism?

Arnold: It was a white school, white neighborhood.

Another student discusses school segregation, which is largely evident in this analysis (see appendix 8). The schools included in this study are primarily black and Hispanic:

Jack: Russians, Arabs, Asians have their own school.

Freshman at Cascade discuss the importance of having teachers and mentors who resemble themselves.

Tom: I'm not really comfortable working with Caucasian teachers.

Why?

Cuz I can't really relate to them.

What do you mean relate? What does that mean?

Like, just the way they talk.

To you, about you, what, what do you mean by the way they talk? The way they sound, the words they use?

Yeah exactly, the way they sound, the words they use, the way they go about things. (Cascade Freshman)

Tom's comments suggested cultural differences between blacks and whites, with mainly black students being educated by white teachers, affecting his academic experience. His words describe resentment for the cultural superiority of whites as Ferguson (2001), posits. Thus, there is a need for more mentors and teachers of color.

Preparation / Skill levels: (Hudson)

When students were asked of their skills in regards to employment, the levels varied tremendously. Some had menial skills, while others boasted technical skills. Some could not articulate their skills or skill levels:

Interviewer: For those who have a job and those who don't, what skills you got for legit work?

Arnold: Verbal skills.

Interviewer: We all got the gift of gab? What skills you got?

Arnold: I work in a restaurant, know how to make cappuccino, memorized names of cakes.

Jack: I worked at McDonald's.

Rob: I can fix things, carpentry, construction work.

Interviewer: Where did you get these skills?

Rob: I was the fixer, fixed things in the house.

Nick: I can think of anything. I am creative, can put together programs, if had the right kind of money...movie- promotions.

In the following dialogue, the students were able to list more skills associated with gang affiliation. The mere fact that this was done illustrate the type of lifestyles and environments many black males continue to face:

Interviewer: What skills does it take to be in a gang?

Arnold: Need energy, skills, be ahead of people, know people, who to mess with, who not to mess with, math skills to sell, need to know how much money you made.

After returning to the skill question later in the focus group questioning, the students with prompts are able to address needed qualifications:

Interviewer: What about qualifications for a job?

Nick: Need to dress up nice, so they can judge your appearance, but they sometimes judge color. You can have on a nice suit, if see color- they will think you are not qualified. You can have best skills in the world and they won't pick you.

One student described his desire to be an entrepreneur, but appeared to be disillusioned with financial costs in life like many peers in his age range:

Interviewer: What do you plan to do when you go to college?

Jack: I don't want to work for nobody. I wanna be an entrepreneur.

Interviewer: How are you going to fund that?

Jack: Loan from my pops- get a loan from the government.

Interviewer: Who feels ready for college?

Arnold: Junior high was hard, high school was easy.

Interviewer: Do you feel junior high prepared you for high school?

Arnold: Yeah

Interviewer: Does high school prepare you for college?

Nick: Yeah

Interviewer: How many parents went to college?

Nick: Mine.

Jack: My father did a couple of years.

Notion of last chance (Hudson)

Many students in the focus group believe that their alternative environment is their last chance to shape up or else end up in prison or on the street. The students also describe having to contribute to the household monetarily. They describe responsibilities that supersede childhood and school tasks. The following exchange describes this occurrence:

Interviewer: Why did you agree to go to this alternative school?

Arnold: They told me they would clean my record up. I've been doing good, going to my GED program, working.

Interviewer: Why do you do right now?

Rob: I want to change my life, have a baby to take care of.

Jack: I want to have a better life, maybe go to the military, everybody say it's more better for me, my pops went... easier to get an education and a job.

Nick: I'll take anything don't want to be locked up. Got my mother and my little sister. I'm getting my GED, working, I get home at like 2 in the morning, I'm up early, don't get a lot of sleep. Trying to look after my lil sister, never had a father to show me what to do.

Interviewer: You help pay the bills at home?

Nick: Yeah

Interviewer: Anybody else?

Rob: I pay the bills, cuz my grandfather told me to man up. I was man enough to have a baby. I gotta pay rent cuz my shorty and seed (baby) live there.

Interviewer: If you can walk away and not have to worry about anything, would you?

Rob: If we had a chance not to be here, probably some would be here but most won't.

Interviewer: How many would be here for \$7 an hour?

Arnold: Yeah if it involves money. You need money to make moves, get on the train, to go to school. This program, gotta be here anyway, we made the mistakes. I paid the consequences.

Sometimes I get lazy, I'm here cuz I didn't go to school. This is my last chance. People act like they don't want to be here. I be like you put yourself here.

Interviewer: Anything you want to say before we close out.

Rob: Do what it takes to make your money, forget about what other people think. Do what it takes no matter what.

Arnold: Wake up and realize- doing all this fast stuff for them girls, when you get locked up, the only girl that's gonna be there is your mother.

Jack: Ain't nobody gonna be there when you come home.

Rob: Life is not a game. You know how young kids hate school, when you get older, gonna say I should of did that.

In hindsight, the students attending Hudson were able to give advice and words of encouragement to younger children who may be heading astray. Perhaps policymakers can allow for the development of more mentoring programs where at risk youth can have the opportunity to hear from youth like those attending Hudson. Students attending Hudson with guidance from adults can help at-risk students who have not entered the penal system avoid making the same mistakes, which would be a proactive measure. Nonetheless, the students', at Hudson, description of their life, paying bills, working to 2 a.m. highlight the adversities many inner city youth face.

Media's influence on the community

Juniors at MARSHALL High discuss how pop culture can adversely affect their learning. As discussed earlier in this analysis, pop culture cannot be the only culprit because many whites listen to hip-hop. Perhaps pop culture combined with impoverished and or unstructured homes lead students to stray from learning.

Lonny: We don't value education because rappers on TV are making millions of dollars, never went to school. Ask themselves why can't they make millions of dollars. The TV brainwashes you. We don't have anymore role models anymore. We don't have anymore Martin Luther Kings. (MARSHALL High Juniors)

Lonny's train of thought may change considering the election of Obama as president this year. The election of Barack Obama is very historic considering the nation's less than stellar track record in the treatment of people of color.

Interviewer: Young men who don't have that role model, who are not in school, what do you see them doing?

Troy, a freshman at MARSHALL High says:

I think that most of these men see like rappers on TV with the jewelry and the jailbird mentality and just all that gaudy stuff, pants hanging down off your ass and stuff and it's just like, jailbird mentality. (MARSHALL High Freshman)

Vaughn: A way that you can influence people in the community to do good is if you're a rapper 'cuz a lot people in the community listen to what a rapper says. So if a rapper is giving a positive influence into his community and he's telling em' that drugs are bad for you, don't sell that, most people will listen to that 'cause he's the rapper, he's got the money. (MARSHALL High Juniors)

Lonny: That's the way rap was in the 80's, it was to give a positive influence and it was an art form. Now, it's all about making money.

Lonny's response to Vaughn is very timely considering the discussion of misogyny and violence in rap music. What the students and many people who bash current rap music do not discuss is that most rappers do not own the record companies, thus rapping about violence and sex affords them continued employment.

Tying it all together

Students' responses show how institutional racism continues to linger in our society. All of the students' previous high schools were very segregated with low teacher expectations. Even their current high schools were segregated but the experience was much more positive for them. It is quite ironic how all the high schools included in this analysis were comprised when considering the Brown v. Board decision. Social reproduction theory with the intersection of class and race is quite evident in this analysis, where the schools in this analysis were primarily black and Hispanic (see appendix 8 for ethnic make up). Students spoke of low teacher expectations, apathetic teachers, and violent environments when discussing their traditional, previous schools. Legal

socialization was apparent as well when students discussed how people would perceive them if they attended John Jay.

Many of the students had very low morale for police officers, which is who John Jay is known for educating. Some of the black males had gone to jail as well as one teacher at Central, and the interviewer who is now a Professor at John Jay College. Jail is considered a rite of passage in the black community for many males. The conditions in which they live, countless negative encounters with the police as one student from Central explained seeing a police shoot a man for shooting a gun in the air, help erode respect for law enforcement officials. black juveniles and adults are overrepresented in the penal system. According to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency cited in USA Today, the juvenile population in America is 78% white and 17% black, but arrests overall include, white: 70% and black: 28% (Salazar, 2007). Disparities are present as a more in depth look is taken at arrests. Juvenile arrests of murder and non-negligent manslaughter for whites is 48% and blacks 50%, arrests for forcible rape for whites is 64% and black 34%, arrests for robbery include white 35% and black 64%.

Several theories can explain the disparity. One is legal socialization, where a legitimate deficit exists between blacks and police officers. People forget that blacks were not voluntarily included in this society; hence many had to fight for their rights, sometimes literally, i.e. the Black Panthers, and more conventionally through protests and demonstrations. The lingering of racism is ever apparent in our society as seen with the presidential campaign of Barack Obama; now the nation's first black president. Now more than ever in the past decade have racist comments been made regarding Barack Obama's name, religion, and more. Prior to the presidential race, many maintained that the U.S. was a colorblind society, but the election showed that colorblind ideas are not an adequate solution. When the republican candidates, John McCain and Sarah Palin held their

rallies, shouts of “off with his head, kill him, he’s an Arab” filled the room. Nonetheless, people need to discuss issues that exist, which is the purpose of this analysis. Other reasons black juveniles are overrepresented in the juvenile system include: over-policing of urban communities as opposed to suburbia, police discretion, class and race bias, where wealthier parents can afford a lawyer or know the town’s sheriff.

This research recognizes the causes for underachievement are multifaceted. To better understand how family life, community, school community and culture, teacher expectations, and culture all influence the learning experience, the principal investigator on the larger project provides an in depth critique of five schools that he visited. There is no quantitative data or focus groups conducted at the schools: Darwin Academy, Basin, Wake Academy (WA), Midway High, and Southern High. Nonetheless his critique is supported by statistical information from independent sources that evaluate schools and from the New York City Department of Education.

Interview with field researcher regarding school culture, community, teacher expectations, and family life

Interviewer: *How many years have you conducted field research? In general?*

Thompkins: *In general. Ten. Twelve. Starting at Indiana University then Iowa, University of Iowa. The first piece that was major involved me going to different colleges and universities throughout the country. I went to the state of Indiana, Alabama, Iowa, Illinois, South Carolina and administered surveys to students. There were 1750 people in that sample, but I’ve done other things.*

Interviewer: *In visiting the three schools [other schools discussed later], can you tell me what stood out the most to you of the schools?*

Thompkins: *When I think of the three schools, I’m thinking of Basin which is on Staten island, Southern High which is in Brooklyn, I’m thinking about Darwin Academy, but there’s a fourth school, Midway High. So when I think of those schools that I went into, what stood out? The first thing is this: those schools where I felt the greatest learning was taking place did not have metal detectors. So, for example, at Basin High school, it was clear that you had security presence but*

there were no metal detectors so, it was more of a school then an institution of social control. The students at Basin felt involved and included in the educational process. What principal at Basin did, is she brought the family and she brought businesses within the community to the table and they were able to sponsor any kind of program that kids might want. All the athletic programs, you name it, clubs, and everybody was involved and the day that I was there, the parents, many of the parents, the parents association were actually on campus. So Basin, as well as Darwin Academy was headed by women and these women held the students as well as the faculty accountable. Learning was going on because of strong leadership and the leadership demanded the teachers, administrators, and faculty perform at a certain level.

Interviewer: Can you specify which schools had metal detectors?

Thompkins: Well, the schools that had metal detectors were Southern and Midway High. Now Darwin Academy [is a specialty school] and Darwin Academy has one of the highest graduation rates for black males in the country, awarded. Given lots of awards and accolades for their accomplishments, but the point is that at that particular school, again students felt empowered by the process and they were happy with what was going on.

Interviewer: We decided that Southern High had metal detectors and Midway High. Correct?

Thompkins: Right.

Interviewer: Can you describe the relationships between the students, the students have with the school staff, like the security guards, the teachers, counselors, administrators?

Thompkins: Right, that goes back to what I was saying, in some schools you have more learning than others, for example. The schools with an over abundance of security, meaning all the security checkpoints, the metal detectors, the cameras, and etcetera, some of the kids there, felt like they were in jail and the relationship that exists between the kids going to those schools and staff, faculty and administrators, it varies; but lets talk about Midway High for a minute. The majority of the students there are black and brown. The majority of the teachers, faculty, and administrators are white. The majority of security happens to be female and this is school security, and it happens to be female and it happens to be black and brown. So, some of the kids would ask me, well why am I going to go to school only to have teachers put me down, so here's an example. There's a teacher who is old school, and he asks the question, 'Why would their mama let them walk around with their pants hanging down?'

So this is a white guy who is verbalizing his attitude toward the fashion of young black kids. And his attitude verbalized indicates to me that he has these deep seeded feelings about this. So he acts out his power in the way he deals with the kids. He puts them down. 'How come you got your pants down?' Not for the purpose of trying to correct them, but for the purpose of ridiculing them. And he uses his power as a teacher to advance his own processes but by using his power as a teacher against his students, he disempowers them. So kids who once they feel disempowered because their voice is not respected or they don't feel included in the educational process, they reject education.

So at Midway High the relationship between faculty and students is bad and a lot of it has to do with the culture of the school. So when I say culture, if you go to Darwin Academy, which is a new school, just had its first graduating class. It's a school that exists inside a building where there are several other schools, but within that particular piece, everybody is empowered. Right? The kids have pride. When you talk to the kids about their uniforms, they tell me when I'm on my way to school and I got my uniform on people smile at me, 'How are you young man?' Right? But when they don't have their uniform on people stay away from them, because they see something different. They see a young black male, who may be a potential problem, but within the school environment, the kids feel empowered, the teachers feel responsible because the administrator, the principal, Mr. Brown, forces them to be responsible.

If you go to Southern High, now there's a different story, Southern High is controlled by gang members. When I walked up in the school, I saw red everywhere, on the young men, on the young women. When you walk up in the school immediately there is an us versus them ethos, between faculty and students, but also between faculty. And what I mean by that is you have faculty members who have been there for a while who are entrenched in their ideas of right and wrong and you have new faculty, and they can't agree. You have issues at Southern High: students talked about security making deals with gang members, allowing them to get away with certain things in exchange for not acting out violent behavior on school grounds. So, a deal has been made between school security and gang members. Well, other students know about that deal because they see security turn their head when gang members come in. So that makes students feel not only disempowered because of the us versus them ethos between faculty and then faculty and students,

but they feel at risk, they feel at risk, security is a joke. They don't respect security, they're afraid of security.

If you go to Basin, again, students feel empowered. You talk to the kids, they see opportunities, they have opportunities, access to resources. The parents are involved, community businesses are involved, they provide opportunities for every kind of club you can think of. They provide opportunities for kids to participate in all types of athletic activities. It took the kids away from the gangs. Not that you don't have gangs at Basin, but when you talk to the kids they're like, 'You know we don't have gang violence at schools. Of course we got gang members here, but they're not a problem.' At Southern High, they're a problem. At Midway High, there's a problem. Also there, you have issues with security compromising security by allowing the predator students to get away with things in exchange for keeping the peace. This comes from students, I mean teachers, I've had teachers say look, "The metal detectors don't do anything. I have kids giving me guns.' I had teachers say I have kids giving me guns.

Interviewer: Which school was this?

Thompkins: That was at Midway High and Southern High. [Teachers say,] 'I have kids giving me guns.'

Interviewer: Would you say that Southern High and Midway High is run by the students?

Thompkins: Southern High and Midway High is not ran by anybody. It's a what I would term, a disorganized environment, because there's conflict between teachers, faculty, and administrators. You have [office] administrators in the principal's office and they think they run the school. When I was there, I go into the principal's conference room to have a conversation with the assistant principal, an [office] administrator, which is a secretary, comes in and wants to talk about this unruly student and she wants the student chastised. And you have teachers who are afraid of the secretary because of the power that the secretary has. That's ridiculous. That's ridiculous. So, you grow up in that environment clearly, there's a sense of disorganization.

One could say there's some leadership, well the leadership you can see on the surface and they'll say Mr. So and So who's the principal is stern, you got to do this. There's a difference between

being stern and that sternness producing positive results and just being rude and disrespectful to kids. We got to recognize that race still plays a role and when we talk about barriers faced by African American male students; the first barrier is linked to their race and the stereotypes that have been created around who you are. So that young black male walks up into the average school, immediately, there's a category for him. In how you act, your actions, your lack of actions will all be framed and discussed within the ideas associated with that stereotype. You come in, you're a black male youth, well you're not going to be a serious student. You come in, you're a black male youth, you dress a certain way, you must be a gang member, etcetera, etcetera, and etcetera. But, if you go to places like again, Darwin Academy, Basin, and other schools that, I've gone into, WA, (the 5th school). Just the little bit of time that I walked around their halls. Clearly the relationship between teachers, faculty, staff; everybody seems to be on the same page, but then students feel empowered, so the relationship between students and teachers, it's good, to the degree that children, students, respect the voice of teachers and faculty. In these other places, they don't. It's like there's a war going on. Kids go to school to be [messed] with, not taught, and they don't feel safe.

Interviewer: *So you would say that in terms of black male achievement, the school environment does influence or affect...?*

Thompkins: *It's clear, for example, when we [the research team] went into Cascade High School, which is a catholic high school, but the reality is that 70 percent of the students who go there now are not catholic and you might as well say, a black male high school. When you go to the school and every morning when classes start you've got Brother Carney whose number two and you've got several other teachers standing at the door as students come in.*

Now they're not there chastising them, they're not disempowering them. It's part of the process. They're waiting to see who comes in. If you're late, they want to know why. They hold students accountable, but the students there accept it, they appreciate it. Some students will say to me, 'Why should I [care about school]? I've never had anybody hold me accountable. I've never had anybody make me feel like they cared.' Black male achievement is something that, or black males achieving, is something that is influenced by a lot of stuff, the family. The kids that I've talked to

regardless of where it's at, there is somebody in the family generally that went to school or there's somebody in the family that pushes them to go to school and if it's not the family, then it's somebody in the school, it's a teacher. I mean I've had kids say to me in the school. I ask them, 'So, who motivates you? Who inspires you?' They'll say, 'Mr. So and So. Ms. So and So.'

And I'm like, 'well what about your home?' They're like, 'No, not at home. There's nobody.' Black males who achieve tend to come from an environment where education is respected. They tend to come from an environment where education is respected. They tend to come from an environment where there [are] examples of success linked to education. And that's not everywhere. Counter to what some would suggest, I don't think black males reject education because of masculinity issues. I think that some young black men as I talk to them: they see education as a last resort, well not as a last resort, but it's sort of like a terminal degree, because nobody ever told them they could go to college. So, that being said they see the high school diploma as a means to a job. So, a lot of them are quitting school and they're going and getting a GED so that they could go get a job. So, the point here is that they place the same value on a GED as they do a high school diploma, which is, it'll get me a job. They don't think about the fact that that's only going to get them a job making X amount of money. They need more education, because nobody ever told them to.

Interviewer: *Can you describe the communities the schools are located in?*

Thompkins: *Southern High is not in a good community I would say, but I don't live there, but I don't know. But I'm from the South Side of Chicago and I have a background and I felt uncomfortable getting off the train. Basin High School is in Staten Island, nice place. Midway High is here in Manhattan down[town]. Darwin Academy is up in the Bronx and it's near... so there's some businesses around.*

You don't have a lot of kids hanging out around the school. So, what I think is important in terms of this question is that we acknowledge or recognize that many kids at least in New York don't go to school in the community that they live in or the school they go to is not in the community they live in. So the question that you asked, I wish I could follow the kid's home to look at the communities they live in. The communities that the schools are in, except for Southern High, I

didn't see them being problematic. One of the most important pieces that we got to bring to the table when we talk about differences across high schools and black males or any student being successful is that, the school's community is a community. The school is a community and within that community, you have stakeholders.

The teachers are a group, the administrators, security, faculty, custodial faculty, the students, all of these are interest groups and they're all interacting within the school community and it's about power and within these communities a lot of teachers, faculty, administrators, janitorial staff, etcetera, security, they're still thinking the kids should be... seen and not heard. So, they will talk to children in a rude disrespectful way, 'Shut Up! Didn't I say do this?' That's power. They exercise their power in a harmful way. So, I'm saying when we begin to talk about school and kids and kids learning, or kids being bad, we have to step away from the students and pay attention to the interaction between staff and faculty.

How are they interacting with each other within their own interest group, but then how are they interacting across those interest groups? Because at the end of the day, their stuff trickles down on the kids and the kids is the weakest interest group in that environment and power gets played out in such a way that the kids feel disempowered and that has a negative effect on education. The schools that I've been into where there's learning going on, [students] feel empowered. The schools where I go and kids feel or there's no learning, it's because kids feel disempowered because they're not a part of the process. Their voice is not respected; their voice is punished when heard.

Tying it all together

The exchange between Thompkins and the interviewer describes how positive school culture and teacher-student interaction affects learners. Dr. Thompkins describes social capital where students who have someone pushing them at home or in school are more successful academically. His description of the five schools is supported by National Center for Education Statistics, New York City and State Department of Education, and Inside Schools, schooldigger.com, and greatschools.net, independent evaluators of New York City schools, data.

Southern High and Midway High have very low graduation and attendance rates compared to Darwin Academy and Wake Academy (WA). The graduation rate for Southern High is 36.3%, 33.8% for Midway High, 76% for Basin, 73.6% for WA, and 89.7% for Darwin. Attendance rates paint a similar disparity where there is 92% attendance at WA, 91% at Darwin, 84% at Basin, 69% at Midway High, and 63% at Southern High. The field researcher's observations of the schools lends credence to having more supportive environments, respect for both teachers and students, better teacher-student interaction, and less metal detectors in schools.

Do focus group findings support the hypotheses?

Based on the research, the literature regarding black males, initial hypotheses were developed to assist in examining the attitude and perceptions of education for black males in New York City schools. More importantly, this research is concerned with what makes a successful versus unsuccessful black male in New York City High Schools. It was hypothesized that higher achieving black males' attitudes and perceptions toward education resulted from stronger social networks in their residential or school communities. Strong social networks include parental involvement, teacher-student relationship and expectation. Black males coming from strong support systems, either parental, communal or both, who attended high performing schools in the New York City had more positive attitudes about the educational experience and performed better academically than their black male peers. Students whose parents finished high school and college, and whose teachers imparted social capital and had high expectations for them performed better in school.

Because many of the students lived in impoverished neighborhoods and at one time attended under funded public schools, their environments did not include strong social networks initially. Attending their current school proved fruitful for students where they reported teachers

and schools that really cared. Coming from lower income homes, sometimes takes the focus off school and on survival. Additionally, many of these students did not have access to social elite networks that many middle class students can access. Many inner-city schoolchildren do not have family members or friends of family members who are doctors and lawyers. It is true that families who are not from middle class or wealthy backgrounds impart social capital and tell students the importance of an education, but these families are not a part of social elite networks. Ogbu (2003) maintains that foreign-born black students are more likely to be recipients of parents imparting social capital. This study illustrates the notion of social capital impacting students positively, e.g. students from North Academy discussed the difference in values and culture among Caribbean and native born blacks and students from all sites conferred the importance of positive school culture and teacher expectation.

This research contends that educators and policymakers should focus on what can be controlled, i.e. the school environment, because not all children start on a level playing ground and not structural ills can be eradicated. Thus, if social networks in the home and community are not strong, teacher-student relationship and higher expectation from school faculty can assist in overcoming the weakened structure. It is posited that higher achievement is the result of (SF + SS), where strong family plus strong schools has the greatest academic success.

Conversely, if a student lacks strong social networks in the family, community or school, then achievement is lower regardless of income. The independent variables follow: strong family plus weak school, (SF + WS), equals a lower effect, (WF + WS) = lowest effect, (WF + SS) = higher effect, (SF + SS) = highest effect. The dependent variables are low and high achievement. Below are the eight hypotheses discussed earlier; the hypotheses are based on the literature of black males. The hypotheses were formulated as a guiding point for the research even though this

study is qualitative. Data from New York City Department of Education, Inside Schools, school digger.com and greatschools.net, and the social demography survey given to students also helped substantiate the findings.

One: Black American males' perceptions and attitudes of education and the legal system differ from other groups of students.

The focus group findings partially support the notion that black American males view education differently than other students. When reviewing grade point averages and the familial education, it is apparent that more foreign-born blacks, those who identified their ethnicity as Other achieved the 2.5 GPA or higher goal. Forty-five out of 60 African Americans reached the 2.5 or higher GPA goal, while 18 of 25 Caribbean, 11 of 17 Latino and all seven classified as Other reached the goal. Caribbean and African American students' performance was about the same, although more African Americans were included in the study. Latinos did not meet the 2.5 grade point average as the other groups did, which could be due to language barriers. When using 3.0 as a marker of academic success, Caribbean students outperformed black Americans, 52% to 48.3 %, and Others 85.6% to 48.3, while 47% of Latinos reached the 3.0 mark. Unfortunately, not all students answered if they were born outside of the United States. If this were done, the finding that foreign born blacks do better than native born blacks may have been fully supported.

Because students identified ethnicity, it was used to define foreign born and research supports the notion of foreign born blacks performing better in school (see Massey, et. al, 2007; Ogbu, 2003). The exception was for students attending Cascade, where black American males did very well in school. The ranking of the school confirmed the students' success. The findings also revealed that black male hustlers and gang members value education. Students at Atlantic report gang members sending their students to school and telling the students to get their education and

not be like them. The students' comments go against the traditional notion stating black males and specifically gang members do not value education.

According to academics such as Ogbu (2003), black American males' perception of education differs than other groups of students, especially those who are not born in America. He posits that voluntary immigrants do not see Standard English being imposed on them and thus are more successful in school. The concept of involuntary immigration and the effect on the psyche is profound in American society. Scholars such as Ferguson (2001) and Horvat and Lewis (2003) contend that some black Americans reject the culture superiority of the Other, being white dominance. Rejecting the culture superiority of the Other, can hinder black Americans' academic success. This research recognizes rejecting the Other, is not the sole reason many black Americans lag behind academically, but does not dismiss the profound effect this occurrence has on black American students, where the dominant culture views the minority's culture as inferior and treats them inferiorly.

In addition, most of the black males interviewed, they believed that black females valued education more than black males. Across all races, females are performing better than males in school. For instance, for the 2000-2001 school year, 50.5% of females received Regents diplomas compared to 45.5% of males, and more females than males received honors recognition (New York State Department of Education, 2007). The gender disparity is even more profound for children of color. For the 2003 cohort, 57.4% of black females graduated compared to 43.9% of black males (NYSDE, 2007). For Hispanic females in the 2003 cohort, 53.9% graduated compared to 41% of Hispanic males. Eight-four point six percent of white females in the 2003 graduated compared to 77% of white males (NYSDE, 2007). The female students interviewed also confirmed the notion of black males valuing education less. This finding is also supported in previous

research (see Leicht, et. al, 2007; Willis, 1977). However, the answer is not so simple. When reviewing other research of gifted black males (see Harper, 2005; Bonner, 2001; Fries-Britt, 1998; Maton, et. al, 1998) and the conditions in which many inner city school children are taught and live (see Holzman, 2004; Kozol, 2005), light is shed on other factors that contribute to less than stellar results in school. There were also black males in the focus group findings who did very well in school, i.e. Cascade.

As far as black males viewing the legal system differently than other students, direct questions were not asked, but students who attended Hudson, an ATI program had all been involved in the legal system as well as some students who attended alternative schools. Research shows the school to prison pipeline exists (see Hamilton Institute; Drug Policy, 2007). Many black males discussed the prison rite of passage in the focus groups. The interviewer and one faculty member from Central had both gone to prison. Black males also cited quick money and survival, institutional racism within schools as barriers to education. Research shows black males experience racism in the workforce and criminal justice system (see Tonry, 1995; 1996; Spohn, 2000; Reinerman & Levine, 1997; Travis, 2005).

Two: Black males lag behind other groups academically because of school policies and procedures, e.g. gatekeeping and over-classification in special education.

Research supports this hypothesis, where there is a large over-classification of black males in special education courses. In return, many of students' skill levels are low due to low expectations and lower tracking (see Losen, 2002; MacLeod, 1998; Willis, 1977). Fryer and Levitt (2007) show there was no gap for students entering kindergarten, but found no real evidence to support why the gap comes to exist.

Many of the students in the focus groups report being taught by teachers who simply gave hand-outs. Students reported their traditional high school environments did not expect much from them. The students claimed the teachers were afraid of the students. The field researcher also reported going into schools where no learning occurred and where gang members controlled the school. Although the demographic instrument did not collect direct data on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for classified students, national data confirms this hypothesis where blacks males by and large are over classified. Blacks comprise 17% of the youth, but 33% of those classified as mentally retarded (see Losen, 2002; 2002a; 2002b).

Three: Black males who attend large segregated schools with metal detectors will do far worse academically than other groups of students.

The findings from the focus groups supported this notion. Most of the students reported that they were treated like criminals in their former schools. Students said the teachers were afraid of the students and treated them as if they were sub-human. Students acknowledged that metal detectors were needed in some schools, but they also said that if a student wanted to smuggle a weapon in he could. Students reported that security guards were in gangs and helped students bring weapons into schools. One young woman in particular, Lisa at North Academy, said her old school made her feel like a criminal.

The research report done by Fellow and Mukereje (2007) discussed how metal detectors are in segregated poor schools. Students in this research attended such segregated schools before and still attended segregated schools. The students were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Most of the students reported not doing very well in their former schools, which were plagued with metal detectors and violence. The official school statistics support the findings that blacks who attend largely segregated schools with metal detectors do far worse than others do (Fellow &

Mukereje, 2007; Holzman, 2004). This research confirms that violence, metal detectors, and gang influences hinder the learning environment. Dr. Thompkins, the principal investigator on the larger project, went into schools plagued with violence and metal detectors, such as Southern High, and confirmed the lack of learning. His confirmation is supported by official statistics from Inside Schools, New York State and New York City Department of Education, which show low graduation and attendance rates, even though students from those schools were not directly interviewed (see appendix 8).

Four: Black subjects are more likely to leave school due to economic reasons than other groups.

Students' exchanges with the interviewer support this hypothesis. Black males believed many young female students left school due to pregnancy and the need to care for their child. Black males also claimed that instant gratification caused most of their family and friends to leave school. Many of the hustlers who left school resorted to quick money, but they encouraged the younger generation to get their education. Given that many black males in the study were from humble beginnings, survival usually takes the forefront.

Students at Hudson claimed those who left school were stupid, but their description of stupid did not completely explain the adversities encountered. Some of the students report being evicted from their homes and helping with finances in the household. Assisting with finances as a child is a large burden that plagues many students. In this study, 10 students lived with neither parent, 60 out of 151 lived with both parents, and 80 lived with one parent. Hence, when discussing Dr. Fryer's incentive plan to pay students to excel, one should remember that the monies gained can be used to help the family and also serve as a source of encouragement especially when other parts of life seem to not go so well (e.g. place of residence, food, etc.).

Five: Black males are more likely than other groups of students to be arrested, e.g. drug use or sale, than others.

This research does not completely support this hypothesis, because only 10 students reported being convicted of a felony. Still yet, most of the students discussed knowing someone, either family members, such as fathers, and friends who were in jail or prison or previously incarcerated. Perhaps, the reason most students were not largely involved in the criminal justice system is the purposeful sample. Because this study does not include a random sample, administrators and key gatekeepers could have chosen the most readily available students, and could have chosen not to highlight the negative. Additionally, if some students are involved in the criminal justice system, they are not readily available.

Previous research supports the hypothesis, where half of America's prisoners are black and Hispanic, even though blacks only make up 12.3% of the population and Hispanics 12.5%. Although only 10 students in this study had been convicted of a felony, it is unknown how many or if many were convicted of misdemeanors. Six students who attended Hudson, the ATI, were all involved in the criminal justice system, but no quantitative data was available from them. The staff members at Hudson spoke of the high amount of black and brown males in their program. Official data confirms the over-involvement of people of color in the criminal justice system, where they make up over half the nation's prison population (Human Rights Watch Report, 2003).

Six: Black males are more likely to do better academically when taught by highly qualified teachers (those who teach in area of certification).

Research (see Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Kozol, 2005; Holzman, 2004) confirms that most black males attend segregated schools with less money spent per pupil. Because many inner-city schools are under funded, it remains difficult to retain and attract highly qualified

teachers. Teachers who have no certification or are teaching out of their area of certification are teaching many inner city students throughout the nation. Nearly 90% of blacks in New York City are taught by teachers teaching out of certification, e.g. a certified math teacher instructing reading (Holzman & Hyman, 2007).

Students in the focus group described their former traditional high schools as places where no real learning occurred. The students said the teachers did not teach and in return, the students did not do well in school. When the field researcher observed Southern High, he saw no learning occurring. Students were in the halls and the gangs controlled the school. The graduation rate for New York City black males in the 2002-2003 year was 43.9% compared to 77% for white males (NYSDE, 2007). In the 2001-2002 school year, black students comprised 54% of out of school expulsions and 75% of total expulsions (Holzman, 2004). A disparity clearly exists.

Seven: Black males are more likely to have a positive educational experience when teacher expectation is high.

All of the students in the focus group reported negative experiences with teachers in their previous traditional high schools. The majority of the students did not report being in a positive school environment. According to students who attended Cascade, Hudson, Plain, MARSHALL, North Academy, Atlantic, and Central, teachers in their former schools did not expect much from them. Students stated that their former schools were plagued with metal detectors and violence. Students said the teachers fought the students and vice versa.

Teachers at Hudson, Central, North Academy, and Atlantic discussed how their schools were places of empowerment and better student-teacher-school relationships. Students attending the focus groups confirmed their teachers' comments. The students discussed how learning became more important once they left their traditional high schools. Some of the students' grades coincided

with their positive school environment, while others did not reach the GPA goal of 2.5 or higher. Some possible reasons could be lower skill levels due to tracking and attending lower funded schools, being taught by teachers who did not have proper teaching certificates, and having negative experiences in school from earlier years. It is important to note that private school teachers do not need to be certified and thus the higher levels of achievement at Cascade is probably due to positive school culture and higher teacher expectations as the students attending Cascade stated. Another plausible reason achievement is higher in Cascade than traditional schools is the longstanding reputation of the school thus attracting more qualified individuals who care.

Eight: Black males coming from strong support systems, either parental, communal or both, who attend high performing schools in New York City will have more positive attitudes about the educational experience and thus perform better academically than their black male peers.

Findings support this hypothesis where students at Cascade, a catholic school, and North Academy report teachers who were sincere. Although this research did not include individuals from weak schools such as Southern and Midway High, field notes from the interviewer of those sites are included and many of the students attended such schools before their current placement. Students cited apathetic teachers and violent schools as sources of negative attitudes about the learning environment. Lucas, Alvin, and Tom at Cascade credited their private school environment as positive where the teachers cared and taught them well. Students described teachers in their former schools who were afraid of the students. According to the students, teachers in their former schools instructed with handouts the majority of the time and fought with the students. Students did not describe positive experiences in schools plagued with violence and metal detectors.

Students at MARSHALL described a positive school environment where the teachers cared about their well-being. Vaughn described positive interaction with New York transit personnel while walking to the subway wearing his school shirt. Students at North Academy stated that they wanted to conduct their own research to investigate why fewer black males were graduating from high school. Students at North Academy had a cultural theme and many mentors and teachers who resembled them. Students at Hudson, Atlantic, and Central High, the alternative locations, comments highlight the importance of sincere staff who imparts social capital regardless of race.

Tying it all together

Students generally reported a more positive school experience when they left traditional public schools. Focus group participants discussed the importance of high teacher expectation and positive school culture as means to assist the nation's most at risk individuals. Most of the students lived in rental communities, where 99 families rented, and did not have access to social elite networks and the social capital that students from middle class and wealthy neighborhoods have. Still yet, in the empowerment, private, academy, and alternative settings, the students and teachers reported social capital existing, which in return effected positive change academically from the students.

Schools such as Central, Plain and Hudson, alternative settings, allowed students to fulfill internships; thus teaching them life and interviewing skills. North Academy, an empowerment and academy school, assisted students in obtaining internships as well as increased self-confidence. Students at Atlantic, Hudson, Plain, Central, afforded students therapeutic environments and skill training for employment. MARSHALL High, a specialized school, also taught skill development. WA taught students to dress for success and social etiquette, i.e. walk to the right. Other schools such as Southern High did none of the former resulting in low academic achievement.

Nonetheless, this research purports that schools, which impart social capital, instill the value of education, teach social etiquette, and employment skills, can assist students in being successful even if they come from weak family networks, i.e. lower socio-economic status, violent homes and communities, and parents who are not academically involved. This research does not contend that parents from weak families do not care for their children, rather it recognizes the impoverished communities many students reside in and the violence encountered daily, weekly, or monthly. Many times parents are working two or more jobs to provide for the family, leaving many students unattended. Schools can assist by moderately paying students to excel, increasing student-teacher interaction, creating a positive school environment, and imparting social capital. Schools should not overly classify students in special education classes or place them in lower tracking courses, where expectations are exceedingly low. Although not everyone has the same skill level, teaching social capital, work ethic, reading and writing skills should be at the forefront of schools where all students are reading on the proper grade level before advancing. This research purports that individuals who come from weak communal and familial settings can excel in a strong school.

The continuance of weak schools and under-funded schools assist in reproducing the social order. Research also illustrates the over-classification of black males in special education services and the level of gatekeeping in integrated schools (see Losen, 2002a; 2002b) contribute to the class order being reproduced. Students cited apathetic teachers and rundown school buildings as impediments to academic success. The former can erode legitimacy for the school setting and authority figures (e.g. teachers, principals, guidance counselors) similarly to the legitimacy deficit that exists for police and the criminal justice system in black neighborhoods (Jones-Brown, 1997).

DISCUSSION

Due to the plight of black males across the nation, initiatives such as the BMI have been launched to assess the needs of this group. Programs at the various CUNY schools aim to recruit and retain black males where BMI officials work with College Now faculty at the various schools. Even though the literature cites the over-representation of black males in prison or under supervision and the under-representation in schools and university, some disagree with the goals of the Black Male Initiative claiming gender bias. Men of color such as Michael Myers and Pedro Noguera debate the effectiveness of such programs and consider the BMI program as discriminatory. Noguera contends that such gender discriminatory programs can have especially negative effects for black males, which can lead to hyper-masculinity. On the other hand, supporters of the BMI, including the City Council and CUNY schools, realize the hardships faced by many black males and seek to address them. This realization made this research possible where the City Council funds the initiative, thus allowing in depth research with inner-city students.

Focus group findings reveal the causes of failure are not simple. Admittedly, students have a level of individual responsibility when they choose to fail by not attending classes and not completing the required work. Still yet, the lone culprit of failure may not be that the child does not care; there must be other reasons for their apathy. The students in the focus groups attributed their lack of success in former schools to the culture of the school and low teacher expectation. Low teacher expectation in traditional schools support social reproduction theory where students in remedial or lower level courses are disciplined more and not taught progressively. So much so that the training many students of color receive in such environments prepare them to become blue-collar workers (Willis, 1977). Agency does have a factor as seen in Willis's (1977) work, when

many of the students respond to a non-encouraging environment by cutting and not putting forth effort.

Yet, such a rationale does not explain it all. There are multiple reasons for success or lack of success as illustrated in the findings. Many of New York City students live in impoverished, violent communities, attend schools that gatekeep, which does not prepare them for college or college bound courses, are taught by under-qualified teachers more often than suburban students, and don't have many role models that resemble them. This in turn can create an individual with low self-esteem, which could lead one to choose failure. Multiple factors attribute to the achievement gap. For instance, racism affects the learner, where teachers' and counselors' expectations are lower for students of color. Additionally, the students in the focus group attended segregated schools. The research shows that segregated schools suffer from low teacher morale and less resources per pupil (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Holzman, 2006).

When talking to another educator at my high school about the achievement gap. This science teacher compared the work ethic and engagement of his honors, regents level, and lower level students and concluded that the lower level students did not care. I said, "You have to ask yourself why the lower level students do not care. If a longitudinal study were conducted, we would probably find the culprit, which can range from tracking in elementary school, low expectations from the school and teachers, family, and or economic problems. The reasons why some students choose to fail or not fail is very complex. There is no easy answer." The students in the focus group indicated reasons for success, which ranged from providing a supporting environment, having higher teacher expectations, and having more support services in the school, i.e. College Now, Learning to Work programs, etcetera.

Some students reported not being prepared academically, i.e. students at Hudson, who had been involved in the criminal justice system. For most students, by the time they arrive to high school, it is far too late to reengage them in learning or to teach them basics skills especially while having the responsibility of preparing them to pass state exams. It is very difficult to teach reading and writing skills and history or another core subject to students in one period.

It is maintained that students who are not performing well academically, earlier on in their learning career, negative encounters occurred either in the elementary school, particularly pertaining to skill levels, tracking, low expectations, and problems in their home life. Additionally, many students lack the social capital necessary for academic success (Coleman, 1988). A child is not born to be lazy or to fail; something happens in that child's life to propel them in that direction. It is agreed that some people have more talents, skills, and more intelligence, which enhances their achievement, but I have seen many students with high work ethic and average skills excel.

A whole generation of black boys is failing; the reason cannot solely be that they don't care. The onus cannot simply be placed on students or educators, because as an educator, I see firsthand the students who appear to choose failure, by not attending classes, studying, or putting forth effort, but there may be other reasons: low skill levels from tracking, familial problems, and etcetera. Some fault may lie in weak educators, as well. When talking to a teacher assistant who has been working at my high school for three years about the achievement gap, he affirms that weak teachers are an issue. Tony said, "Some teachers are afraid of the students and lack classroom management." He adds, "White female teachers in particular have an issue dealing with black males. Many times they (teachers) try to become the students' friend as opposed to a seniority figure." Some weak educators do not interact well with students or teach well. As an educator, I would do this analysis an injustice if I simply removed all responsibility from the students and

parents and placed it in on educators, but the educational system, which goes beyond teachers to policymakers and school district and building leaders, needs to be reformed to meet the needs of all students.

Poverty, structural ills, and lack of parental supervision or support cannot be eradicated, but some changes can be made. Educators have control of what is done in the school building, and on the larger scale, policymakers have control of what can be done outside of the school, such as changing penal policy and ensuring equitable resource allocation to schools, with subsidies to districts lacking high taxes. Many educators including myself work very hard to instruct students, and if they are not engaged, do not study and choose to fail, frustration can arise. Nevertheless, some students and schools suffer from jaded educators. Educators need to remember that the educational system is an institution like other institutions such as the criminal justice system that could use reforming. Policymakers and school leaders can effect change. School faculty can change the way they think about the students in their classes, offices, and hallway.

With African Americans constituting the majority of high school dropouts and prisoners, whom are mainly incarcerated for drug use, action needs to be taken. Schools should implement more programs to engage learners from elementary school. More mentors are needed for black males. The war on drugs and poverty helps criminalize a generation of urban youth and ruins the lives of people who have been sent to prison for many years for simply using drugs.

This disparity in policing continues the crippling of black communities stemming from colonization and the practice of slavery—categorizing the war on drugs as the new Jim Crow (Nunn, 2002). The historically racialized environment of the nation, where blacks many times had to disobey the law to achieve equality, illustrates a legitimacy deficit exists among blacks (Jones-Brown, 1997). In Jones-Brown's research, legal socialization theory assessed the attitudes and

perceptions of black male youth towards the law. Her study describes the existence of blacks within a historically racialized legal environment affects thoughts about the law and law-violating behavior. A deficit in the emotive dimension existed, which suggested a significant implication for law abiding or delinquent behavior. The students in this study as in Jones-Brown's research did harbor negative feelings for police. Some students in this research suggested attending John Jay College of Criminal Justice would cause teasing from others. Participants in the focus group described going to jail or knowing someone in prison or jail. Students described others who sold drugs to survive and to make quick money. Because black and Hispanics are the majority of people in prison, jails, probation or parole, measures to reverse this trend must be taken.

Due to this negative relationship with the penal system, the Criminal Justice Working Group of CUNY believe that many black men may be dissuaded from attending an institution aligned with criminal justice and law enforcement (BMI Task Force, 2005). Attributable to the deep penetration of the criminal justice system on people of color, the members of the working group at John Jay College of Criminal Justice feel the school has the obligation to address the intersection of race, gender, and justice to improve educational outcomes for black men who attend CUNY (BMI Task Force, 2005).

For this reason, this research not only suggests changes in penal policy, but also contends that proactive measures should be taken. Schools and educators across the nation need to make implementing programs for black males a priority at a very young age. Students need to see people who resemble them. Efforts to prevent initial incarceration by diverting first time offenders would reap rewards as well as revisiting the policy decision that reduces educational opportunities in prison because black males are affected most harshly. Additionally, paying students to excel may prove fruitful as economist Roland Fryer maintains. Although the goals of his initiative are

understood, confliction remains regarding paying students to excel. It is recognized that times have changed and the students being paid are part of America's most impoverished. Monies received can help instill work ethic, assist in academic success, and survival.

When assessing class, race, and access to resources it is important to note that 75% of poor blacks live amongst poor blacks, while only 25% of poor whites live with other poor whites (West 2004). If one compares the same income of whites and blacks, whites still have more wealth than blacks do because much of that difference in wealth is held in white owned homes. Access to property allows for wealth and opportunity for the next generation with the appreciation of real estate and the ability to pass it along to offspring. African Americans have a harder time doing this. In 1995, the median black family had 1/8 net worth of the median white family, while Hispanics had only 1/12⁶, illustrating a legacy of racial inequality. African Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans have not gained equity by paying rent, which stem from the hindrance of mortgages to people of color or the divestment of resources in minority neighborhoods.

Although many critical thinkers such as Clarence Thomas claim color doesn't matter much anymore especially post civil rights era, they fail to recognize that the post civil right legislation did not address the underlying issues already in place that allowed for the accumulation of wealth disparity, such as houses and cars for the next generation. Social reproductionists assert disparities result from money and power not race, but this assertion does not appreciate the intersection of class and race. What appear to be economic differences between the races has been the result of racial legislation and historical discrimination (Roediger, 1999; Blauner, 1972). Those who have privilege don't notice it, but if society sincerely would like to adequately address the

⁶ PBS. Race, Power of an Illusion. Background Readings: Where race lives- go deeper. Retrieved on 26 February 2007 from http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm

socioeconomic problems of the many marginalized groups, the equality of conditions should be addressed because a color blind society will not end inequalities; the inherit structure is unfair.

This analysis is a call to action for policymakers nationwide to make changes in the criminal justice and educational systems. By examining the plight of black males in education and gathering information regarding the attitudes and perceptions toward education from black males, females, and teachers, faculty and staff of different races, this study aimed to provide insight directly from the at-risk group itself. This research acknowledged the relation of penal policy, e.g. drug policy to attendant consequences on employment, education, quality of life, and communal relationships. Talking to the at-risk population themselves enriched the existing body of research, since previous studies depended largely on quantitative data. The focus groups' findings assessed the contextual variables that attribute to being a successful or unsuccessful black male student and citizen. Students maintain positive role models, parental and or familial influences, positive school culture, lack of metal detectors in school, small schools, and high teacher expectation attribute to academic success. The former are important for all students' academic success. Although the research focused on the at-risk population, the underachievement of poor whites and black females is also noted (see Kozol, 1991; 2005; McShepard, et. al, 2007). The achievement gap between black males and females is the largest. Nonetheless, the research suggests that underachievement is not unique to black males.

Limitations of the research

There were some benefits and limitations to using focus groups to examine black males' attitudes and perceptions of New York City High schools. Some benefits include the study being conducted in the students' natural settings, except one conducted at John Jay College, and reported in a timely manner. The focus group methods used allowed for flexibility. For instance, the

interview guide permitted questions to be modified during the study when preliminary findings generated more questions. The interviewer learned aspects of negative behavior, i.e. cut parties, which led to the desire to conduct further research. Students discussed the importance of code switching, which was not included on the questionnaire. The sampling methods allowed for a large amount of topics included in the study, e.g. the various themes. Sessions were audio taped and transcribed. The data was based on the focus group participants' categories of meaning.

Some limitations existed. Focus group settings are seductive in nature, where people sometimes assign more importance to observing live participants than necessary. Focus group data is sometimes hard to interpret and analyze. To compensate for this, the research team used triangulation and negative case checking. The small sample size of 105 black males and 50 females do not make the research generalizable, but does confirm previous research conducted (Gibson, 2003; Holzman, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Quantitative data was only available for six of the seven schools, 151 of the 155 students, and not the five schools the field researcher visited. White students were not used as a comparison group, the comparison group of girls was not large, and the ethnic groups were unmatched. Still, national graduation rates and research depict black females and foreign born blacks are more successful than black American males are academically (Holzman 2004; New York State Department of Education, 2007). This research suggests that underachievement is not exclusive to black males. The achievement gap is largest between black males and females, but there are also white males, as in Cleveland, and black females who are not successful academically (McShepard, et. al, 2007).

Self-reporting biased also influences the results, when students did not answer all questions; e.g. born outside of America where only 25 students answered the question, and for

working while in high school half of the students neglected to report on how many hours they worked, and 41 did not list their grade point average. Because the research sought to compare black Americans to foreign-born blacks, foreign-born should have been completely operationalized to include first and second generation students. Second generation students can still have values from parents. Participants from each school were not equal, where North Academy included 86 students and MARSHALL High only 10. Students self-reported their grade point averages and could have exaggerated the truth. In qualitative studies, the Hawthorne effect may influence the results, because when people know they are being studied, their answers may be exaggerated.

For the most part, students' GPAs did not correlate with the ranking their school had. For students who attended Cascade, their GPA correlated with the ranking of the school, but private school data is not readily available to confirm. Because interviews were conducted during the normal school day, all the questions could not be asked and answered in one classroom period. Possible additions to the social demographic survey, which included amount of time students spent with family or with the television, were not asked to the participants due to time constraints. Said questions, which address social capital, is recommended for future research.

Other limitations with qualitative studies include possible researcher bias especially when not grounding theory because researchers may only focus on the initial research questions and themes. To counteract the aforementioned, this research was conducted along with a research team, Douglas Thompkins, the principal investigator on the larger project and Andre Spynda. Initial hypotheses, independent, and dependent variables were included, which usually is not included in qualitative studies, but they were used as a guiding point. To strengthen the findings, combined methods of both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The principal investigator on this

study correlated the findings with the research team and official data from New York City Department of Education and Inside Schools Organization. Dr. Thompkins, a skilled moderator, was used to avoid using leading questions, biases, inappropriate and dominating members. Another limitation is qualitative results are not tested to be statistically significant like quantitative data is. Hypotheses formed were a guiding point, although the study is not quantitative. The hypotheses could not be tested to be statistically significant like quantitative data can.

Because a purposeful sample was selected with the help of school administration, the findings may not be reflective of the majority of the students who attended the same schools as participants. For instance, respondents' grade point averages for the most part did not correlate with the school's ranking, this may have occurred due to the purposeful sample where a handful of involved students were readily available or selected. Generally, most people will not choose to highlight the negative, not to mention students who are involved in school activities are more accessible. For future research, it is recommended to conduct a similar study with a random sample of every tenth name on the school's roster.

Chapter VI

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

Policy on No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

No Child Left Behind legislation initiated in 2001 mandates that all students be held to certain levels of achievement. NCLB involves required state standards, adequate student progress, measuring progress, reading first, math achievement, and student assistance, e.g. tutoring (Barr & Parrett, 2003). This national policy appears to hold schools accountable and to assist students left behind; however, policymakers need to ensure adequate funding to low performing schools in order for NCLB to succeed. Tax subsidies should be given to districts that do not have strong tax bases. Inner-city schools remain under-funded and under-staffed. The nation's most at-risk youth attend schools that are segregated and taught by teachers who are teaching out of their certification area or are not certified (Holzman, 2004).

Research shows 30% of the nation's students graduate from college, but the other 70% needs to be adequately educated (Barr & Parrett, 2003). One-fourth of the nation's students drop out of high school and very few achieve middle classdom (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Social reproduction theory maintains that these students are taught remedial skills to reproduce the class order (MacLeod, 1995; Allen, 2001). When adding race to social reproduction theory, the nation's prison population and high school dropouts, social reproduction theory is illustrated. Students who are illiterate correlate with the nation's more than 50% of men and women in prison, majority black and brown (MacLeod, 1995; Allen, 2001; Barr & Parrett, 2003). Racial inequalities in the penal and education systems result from a variety of conscious and unconscious factors. Institutional racism, intentional discrimination, and unacknowledged racism continues to affect all aspects of life for people of color. Policymakers and educators need to recognize that a color-blind

society does not create equality. Proactive measures to recruit mentors and more teachers of color, especially black males on the elementary and middle school levels, need to be employed, e.g. programs beginning with early pre-k, kindergarten, and elementary students that allow for older students to mentor younger learners. Financial literacy, life skill, and social issues and justice should also be taught to students in a collaborative school, district wide effort. Adequate funding to NCLB, lower college costs and student loans can increase the high school and college graduation rate and higher achievement.

Policy on Education

Advocating for students and providing support for students is crucial for many, especially those living on their own or coming from impoverished homes. All students should be connected with someone who cares at school, educators should stay informed and pay attention to research on school violence, have community meetings to inform parents, churches, and youth organizations about youth problems and expectations from students in school (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Some experienced teachers suggest personalizing the classroom by greeting students at the door can be advantageous, as well (Barr & Parrett, 2003).

Schools should develop collaborative associations within local communities to address the needs of at risk students, conduct assets surveys with teenagers in the community to identify behavior of students (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Teachers should maintain high expectations for all students. Educators need to also understand the gender differences in learning for all students and plan lessons accordingly (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Research shows single sex classrooms and schools can positively influence learning (National Association of Single Sex Schools, 2007; Gewertz, 2007; Cooper, 2006, BBC News, 2005). The students at Cascade, the all male school in the study confirmed the notion of single sex environments being worthwhile. The young men at Cascade

High explained the negative influence, e.g. distraction from females, co-educational environments had on them.

Additionally, schools should work to get more parents involved, assist poor students with understanding “the hidden rules of the middle class,” impart social capital, etiquette, and structure homework appropriately where time in school is allowed for preparation (Barr & Parrett, 2003, p. 91). Home visits by schools could also prove to be invaluable to students’ success, where educators can see firsthand the many adversities students face (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Schools with positive school leaders who communicate effectively with staff, set the academic tone, have high expectations from all staff and students can improve the academic environment.

Expanding breakfast and lunch is essential for underprivileged children. Educators at Central High acknowledged that school food is sometimes the only source of food or nutrition for some students. Students in the focus groups, especially at the alternative schools, reported smaller environments to be more conducive to learning. New York City has seen a tremendous restructuring of large schools. This should continue but with better access to resources because creating five schools within one leads to competition for programs such as art and physical education. New York City schools should restructure the access to such programs.

Nonetheless, smaller schools allow for increased student-teacher-staff interaction and avoid feelings of alienation. Students should be prepared for life beyond high school and have the options of college or trade schools presented to them equally. Learning in the classrooms should be made relevant. Students report learning from teachers who keep it real and make learning relevant (Gibson, 2002). Districts need to create programs available to students early on in their academic career. Adequate head start and kindergarten classes should be available to all parents. Health insurance also would ensure healthy children and families who can focus on learning. Looping,

where teachers follow students for two grades can allow for better teacher-student relationships. Multiage classrooms would be beneficial to learning, where grades one to three, for example, are organized for instruction with older students helping younger students (Barr & Parrett, 2003).

Schools should create partnerships with local communities and replicate successful programs. One such school in New York City, not included in this study, has a bank in the school, which enables the school to teach banking and financial literacy to student bankers. Other schools such as Plain and Hudson High had internship programs. Some schools in Florida for example, have created four-day academic schedules and use Fridays as a day of enrichment and remediation (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Using technology, educational software, and computer programs can also increase learning, where students who fail a course, can be self-paced on a Nova Net program, an alternative, online, interactive curriculum (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Before and after school programs can assist most students with homework assignments. Schools can also implement portfolio assessments and can establish a senior project or performance graduation requirement (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Schools can create mentor programs and use teachers, school staff, and employees of community organization as mentors.

Mentoring programs with students from ATI programs and alternative settings can be established with middle school aged youth. In this instance, students who walked down the wrong path can speak of the dangers of the street and jail to at risk students. Programs such as College Now, where professors from CUNY schools such as John Jay, teach civic courses in local high schools, should be continued and expanded. Social demographics and pre-tests, which include skills assessment, e.g. academics, self-esteem, and civics, can be conducted to develop programs to address inner city youth. Programs that address civics, academics, such as SAT preparation, and career development with college and career consultants can be implemented. Workshops that

address self-esteem and constitutional rights (civics) would be a proactive measure aimed at preventing criminal involvement and increasing academic success.

Policy on Incarceration

Studies reveal children of colors' chances for being incarcerated are increased by structural ills that pervade schools and the penal system because of the failure of the two systems to work together (Eaton & McArdle, 2007). Policymakers need to acknowledge that punitive measures used by the juvenile justice system may contribute to increased delinquency rather than lowering it because measures that are more punitive lower the legitimacy of law for black youth (Jones Brown, 1997). The government should incorporate more programs, e.g. mentoring and academic, and interventions that include civic law for peers and families to enhance legitimacy, instead of spending more tax dollars on detention centers and prisons (Jones-Brown, 1997). Mentors who resemble students and not the majority white middle-class may also increase legitimacy.

Ineffective policies should be replaced with interventions and programs aimed to prevent students from dropping out of school and helping those who have left school or entered the penal system successfully re-enter society (Eaton & McArdle, 2007). Research depicts that high school dropouts are arrested 3.5 times more than high school graduates are in their lifetime. One point four billion dollars in incarceration rates each year could be saved with an increase of only 1% in the high school graduation rate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Imprisonment does not have to be inevitable.

There is a need to prevent over-incarceration of people of color and initiate measures that aim to discourage at risk youth involvement in the penal system and encourage education. Proactive encouragement of education is crucial, but if it isn't employed, education and rehabilitation in prison could prove fruitful. There is a strong correlation between high school drop

out rates and crime (Western et. al, 2003). In 1999, 52% of black male high school dropouts possessed prison records as they approached their mid thirties compared to one in ten white males between age 22-30 who were in prison or jail in 1999 (Western et. al 2003). States need to increase spending on education and decrease correction expenditures. From 1977 to 1999, total state and local expenditures increased 946% on corrections compared to a 370% increase in spending on all levels of education (Western et. al, 2003). This research recognizes ensuring an equitable education for all and decreasing prison rates threatens the social order and profit gains of employers, private prisons, and etcetera. Still yet, less money spent on corrections and more spent on education would prove productive, while simultaneously lowering incarceration rates. Dilapidated schools should be rebuilt, remodeled, or demolished if need be, because creating a site that resembles learning is important. A positive learning environment, without decrepit ceilings and windows can empower the students and increase self-esteem. Individuals attending a decaying school may feel like the school doesn't care about him or her.

Other policy suggestions include increasing job placement assistance, i.e. Job Corp, increasing wages of low-income fathers who do not live with their children, and creating programs that address high divorce, incarceration, drop out, and unemployment rates. Diverting minor offenders, teaching job and life skills to prisoners for successful integration, and preparing quality students from pre-kindergarten to high school and to college need to be implemented (McGlynn, 2006). Students from local colleges can have dialogues with students from third to 12th grade about the college experience. College students can receive community service and recognition from both the public school and college as incentives.

Appendix 1

How do you define success?

Questions:

How many times were you absent from school in the past (year, semester, month, etc.)?

Do you show up to class on time?

Are you prepared for class? (Ex. Textbook, notebook, pen, assignment due completed)

Do you read ahead? To prepare for what's coming up for class?

How much time do you spend on h/w?

Interview questions for Strong Family

How many waking hours are spent with your family?

During the week_____

On the weekend_____

Do you sit down and eat dinner with your family?

How often?

Do you live with your parents? Yes__ No__

If yes, do you contribute towards living expenses?__ __

If no, who do you live with? _____

Does your environment at home facilitate your role as a student?

Are you able to study at home? If not, why? Where do you find it easier to study?

Interview questions for Strong School (environment)

Are you part of any after-school activities? Yes__ No__

If yes, which ones? _____

Are you part of any athletic teams? Yes__ No__

If yes, which ones? _____

What types of qualities would a model teacher possess? Do any of your teachers exhibit these qualities? How many? Most? Few?

What type of relationship do you have with your teachers?

How many hours a week are you free to study?

Of those free hours, do you use them to study?

Appendix 2

JOHN JAY COLLEGE CUNY BLACK MALE INITIATIVE

High School Interview Instrument

Social Demography Information:

1. High School you attend? _____
2. Specialized Program: _____
3. AGE: _____
4. High school Grade Point Average (GPA): _____
5. Does your high school have AP (Advanced Placement) classes? Yes___ No___
If so, have you taken any? Yes___ No___
6. Does your high school offer College Now courses? Yes___ No___
If so, have you taken any College Now courses? Yes___ No___
7. Do you work while attending high school? Yes___ No___ If so, how many hours per week?
_____ How many hours a week do you spend on work related activities? _____
8. Were you ever convicted of a criminal offense? Yes _____ No_____ If so, has this affected your educational experience in any way?
9. Did one, both, or neither of your biological parents live with you all the time while you were growing up? One_____ Both_____ Neither_____
10. What is the highest educational degree attained by your father?
Less than High school___ GED or equivalent___ High School___ 4-year BA or BS___
Masters, Law, MD or PhD___
11. What is the highest educational degree attained by your mother?
Less than High school___ GED or equivalent___ High School___ 4-year BA or BS___
Masters, Law, MD or PhD___
12. How many brothers and sisters do you have? _____
13. In your family are you...

the oldest child? _____

a middle child? _____

the youngest child? _____

other _____

14. How many of your siblings have attended or attend college? _____
How many of your siblings plan to attend college? _____

15. Ethnic Background

Black (African-American) _____

Black (Caribbean/Non-Latino) _____

Black (Latino) _____

Black (African) _____

Other-Identify _____

16. Were you born outside the United States? If so, what country? _____
If so, at what age did you immigrate to the United States? _____

17. Where have you lived most of the time while you were growing up?

Brooklyn _____ Bronx _____ Queens _____ Manhattan _____ Staten Island _____

Long Island _____ New Jersey _____ Up-State New York _____ Other _____

18. Do you live with your parents? Yes____No____ If so, do you contribute towards living expenses? Yes____ No____ If no, who do you live with?

19. Do you have a roommate? Yes____ No____

If so, does having a roommate have a negative effect on your abilities to be a student?
Yes____ No____

20. In your home community would you estimate that more families rent or own their residences?

More families rent _____
More families own _____

Possible additions:

Amount of hours spent daily doing hw? Weekly?

Do parent helps with homework? Frequently/sometimes/rarely

Did parents help with homework when younger- elementary/middle school? F/S/R

Do parents attend school functions? F/S/R

Do you eat dinner with your family at least three times a week? Y/N

If not, how often?

Do parents participate in your course selections?

How often do you watch TV daily?

Do you feel your teachers set high expectations of you? Why or why not?

Appendix 3

Focus Group Discussion

The purpose of this research is to increase our understanding of reasons why the number of black males enrolled in and graduating from colleges and universities continues to be lower than enrollment and graduation rates for other groups of students. You have agreed to be part of a focus group interview. These interviews will capture student attitudes, experiences, and perceptions about education and the presence of black men in the college and university setting. The questions you will be asked are related to your high school experience, your plans for college and your community experience as related to education.

High School Experience: The focus here is on your high school experience. What is your high school like? Do you have access to AP courses? Do you feel you are being prepared for college? Do you feel supported? Do you think that other students in your high school are better prepared for college than yourself? If you were born outside the United States, how has your educational experience differed between countries? Who or what has had the greatest influence on your educational experiences?

Prompts

1. What type of relationship do you have with your teachers?
2. What qualities do you look for in a mentor?
3. Are there any mentoring and tutoring programs at your high school?
4. What subjects do you like?
5. What subjects do you dislike?
6. Do you feel that your high school experience is preparing you for college?
7. Are AP courses available at your high school? If so, what courses have you taken or are currently enrolled in?
8. Does your high school offer College Now classes? If so, have you taken any?
9. How do you feel about the regents? Do you think more focus is placed on preparation for these exams rather than in building skills needed in college?
10. What types of clubs are available at your school? Are you part of any club?

College Plans: The focus here is on your plans after graduation. Do you plan to attend college? If so, which colleges are you considering and why? What are you thinking about majoring in? Will you go to school fulltime? If you are not planning on attending college, what are your plans? Have you been encouraged to attend college? If so, who has been the greatest influence?

Prompts

1. Have you decided to attend college? What colleges appeal to you the most?
2. If you are about to attend college, what programs or services do you think will be important for your transition to becoming a successful college student?
3. Have you considered attending the John Jay College of Criminal Justice? If so, why did you choose John Jay? If not, have you considered attending a different CUNY college?
4. Have you been recruited by a college?

Community Experience: The focus here is on your community structure and the way people interact with you. Is your community supportive of your educational experiences? Do your family

members and community members value education? How many of your peers plan on attending college? How many of your peers plan on joining the military after high school? How many of your peers are in jail or prison? What is the attitude of your community towards the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and students who attend college at John Jay? Do you attend church on a regular basis? Does your congregation provide tutoring and mentoring programs?

Article I. Prompts

1. What type of community do you live in?
2. Is there visible gang activity on the streets of your home community?
3. Is there visible drug activity on the streets of your home community?
4. Have you witnessed any incidents of violence in you high school or in your community? If yes, how has this affected you?
5. Have any of your classmates been victims of violence? If so, did the violence occur while in school? If so, how did this affect you?
6. How many of your black male and black female friends from high school plan to attend college?
7. How many of your black male and black female friends from high school are in prison or on parole?
8. How many of your peers that do not attend school have a job?

Family Experience & Household Structure: The focus here is on determining the effect of a student's family structure and experiences at home on their role as a student and their level of success. If you live at home, do you contribute towards living expenses? How many hours a day do you spend on household responsibilities? Do you have children?

Prompts

1. Are you a parent or an expecting parent? If so, how many children do you have?
2. How has being a parent affected your studies? Your future plans?
3. What type of household responsibilities do you have?
4. How many hours a week are you free to study?
5. Does your environment at home facilitate your role as a student?
6. Are you able to study at home? If not, why? Where do you find it easier to study?
7. Does being a student reduce the amount of money available for household expenses?

Black Male College Presence: The focus here is on investigating what black male perceptions and attitudes are concerning a college education and the presence of black men in college?

Prompts:

1. Do you think that black men place the same importance on a college education or education in general, as do men of other racial/ethnic groups?
2. Do you think that black men place the same importance on education as do black women?
3. For black men who do not go to school, what do they do?
4. How do you think black men feel about black men who are in college?
5. How do you feel about Kanye West's comments to the rap community and society in general about the value of a college degree? (That a college education is not necessary to be successful).
6. Do you think that black men in the music, entertainment, and sports world promote college education as a means of making it?

Black Female College Experience: The focus here is on discovering how the beliefs and attitudes, and perceptions of black women towards a college education or education in general are different from those of black men. Why are black women attending college at rates much higher than black men?

Prompts:

1. Do you think that black females place higher importance on education than do black males?
2. How do you think black males feel about black females who attend or are planning to attend college?
3. Do you think that black female students put more effort and energy into their education than do black males? If so, why?
4. Do you think that black females prefer black men who attend college over black men who do not attend college?

Race Relations: The focus here is on the relationship between race and skin color and a person's identity here at your school and in your community. Are people treated differently depending on their skin color? Are certain students provided resources and opportunities denied others possibly because of their skin color? Has skin color affected your choice in the types of clubs or activities you participate in?

Article II. Prompts:

1. How do you define racism?
2. Have you ever encountered racism at school?
3. Have you ever felt you were being discriminated against?
4. Do you think your skin color influences how you are treated by your teachers (black, Latino, Asian, and white)?
5. Do you think your skin color shapes how you interact with other students at your school?
6. Do you think the color of your skin influences the quality of the service you receive from the support services at your school?
7. What are the issues regarding skin color among black males/females at your school that influences your experience as a student?
8. How does your experience of colorism at school reflect the colorism you have experienced in your everyday life outside of the school?
9. Did you ever experience an incident at your school because of the color of your skin in which you felt hurt and discriminated against? Has such an experience caused you to consider stop coming to school?
10. Do you know of any student who has stopped coming to your high school because he or she felt discriminated against because of the color of his or her skin?
11. Based on the various ethnic groups (Latino, Euro-America, blacks and Asians etc) you have interacted with at the school, do you feel that there are differences in terms of how these ethnic groups relate to you based on the importance they give to skin color?
12. Can you discuss the relationship between your race/ethnicity and your identity as a student at your high school and within your community?

People You Admire: The focus here is on determining who the influential people in your life are. Who do you admire the most and also. Who do you admire the least? What do you consider your worse possible fate?

Prompts

1. Do you believe in heroes? If yes, who are your heroes and/or role models?
2. Who among your immediate family do you admire the most?
Why do you admire him/her?
3. Who among your extended family do you admire the most?
Why do you admire him/her?
4. Who among your friends do you admire the most? Why do you admire him/her?

Final Question

Speaking as a black male living in the United States, how do you define success?

Appendix 4

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

My name is Arlene Garcia and I am a doctoral student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the principal investigator of this project. The purpose of this research is to attain a better understanding as to why certain high schools have a higher dropout rate than others. I would like to speak to your child and other students about what they believe are the reasons why some students stay in school and others dropout. The questions I will ask your child will involve him/her and others in his/her group talking about their family, high school, and community experience as related to education.

The group interviews will be tape-recorded. Your child may refuse to answer any question at any time. If recording makes your child uncomfortable in any way, he/she can ask me to stop the recording and he/she can remove themselves from the group without penalty. The primary researcher will have control over access to the tapes and all tapes and resultant transcripts will be identified with a randomly assigned number to help maintain confidentiality. All materials (tapes, consent forms, and transcriptions) will be kept in separate, locked filing cabinets, and tapes will be destroyed after the research analysis is completed.

I foresee no potential harm for participating in this study. Potential benefits will include meaningful dialogues about the reasons why high school students drop out and the bonds that keep students in school. It will also help to understand this problem and develop strategies to effectively deal with it in the United States. There will be approximately 60 other participants taking part in this research.

The results of this study will be included in different reports and articles, but names of people, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send you a copy in the future. If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at 914-422-2135, argarcia@jjay.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact **Professor Douglas Thompkins**, of John Jay College of Criminal Justice at **212-237-8000** and dthompkins@jjay.cuny.edu.

Initials of Participant:_____

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

I understand the contents of this Parental Consent Form and the description of the project and its potential benefits, my child's role, potential risks, and steps taken to protect my child's privacy contained on the preceding page. All of my questions about this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand the following:

- My child does not have to answer specific questions;
- There is no penalty for failure to provide any information;
- My child can refuse to participate at any point and it will not affect him or her in any way;
- Interviews will be tape recorded unless I ask otherwise;
- The principal researcher will maintain control over all tapes and that the tapes will be destroyed upon completion on the research project;
- I will not have access to the responses my child gives to questions asked as part of focus group interview.
- No real names will be used to identify people in any of the focus groups.
- All written and published information will be reported so that none of the participants can be identified.

Date: _____

Signature of Parent: _____

Consent to tape record interview

Please check one of the following. If a response is not selected I will not tape record the interview.

I do not mind if you tape record my child's interview. ☐

Please do not tape record my child's interview. ☐

Appendix 5

YOUTH ASSENT FORM

My name is Arlene Garcia and I am a doctoral student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the principal investigator of this project. The purpose of this research is to attain a better understanding as to why certain high schools have a higher dropout rate than others. I would like to speak to you about what you think are the reasons why some students stay in school and others dropout. I also want to talk to you about your own educational experiences. The questions I will ask you will involve talking about your family, high school, and community experience as related to education.

The interview will be tape-recorded. You may refuse to answer any question at any time. If recording makes you uncomfortable in any way you can ask us to stop the interview at anytime without penalty. The primary researcher will have control over the tapes and all tapes and resultant transcripts will be identified with a randomly assigned number to help maintain confidentiality. All materials (tapes, consent forms, and transcriptions) will be kept in separate, locked filing cabinets, and tapes will be destroyed after the research analysis is completed.

I foresee no potential harm greater than what you face in everyday life from participating in this study. Potential benefits will include meaningful dialogues about the reasons why high school students drop out and the bonds that keep students in school, in order to better understand this problem and develop strategies to effectively deal with this problem in the United States. There will be approximately 60 other participants taking part in this research.

The results of this study will be included in different reports and articles, but names of people, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send you a copy in the future. If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at 914-422-2135, argarcia@jjay.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact **Professor Douglas Thompkins**, of John Jay College of Criminal Justice at **212-237-8000** and dthompkins@jjay.cuny.edu.

Initials of Participant:_____

YOUTH ASSENT FORM

By signing this form I certify that I have read the Youth Assent Form and agree to participate in the research project.

I have read the previous page of the Youth Assent Form and understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I understand that the interview will be tape-recorded. I understand that the principal researcher will maintain control over all tapes and that the tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. Further, I understand that I can refuse to answer any question at any time or terminate the interview at any time without penalty.

Date: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Consent to tape record interview

Please check one of the following. If a response is not selected I will not tape record the interview.

I do not mind if you tape record the interview. ☐

Please do not tape record the interview. ☐

Researcher: _____

Appendix 6

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Arlene Garcia and I am a doctoral student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the principal investigator of this project. The purpose of this research is to attain a better understanding as to why certain high schools have a higher dropout rate than others. We would like to speak to you about what you think are the reasons why some students stay in school and others dropout. We also want to talk to you about your own educational experiences. The questions we will ask you will involve talking about your high school experience as related to education.

The interview will be tape-recorded. You may refuse to answer any question at any time. If recording makes you uncomfortable in any way you can ask us to stop the interview at anytime without penalty. The primary researcher will have control over the tapes and all tapes and resultant transcripts will be identified with a randomly assigned number to help maintain confidentiality. All materials (tapes, consent forms, and transcriptions) will be kept in separate, locked filing cabinets, and tapes will be destroyed after the research analysis is completed.

I foresee no potential harm greater than what you face in everyday life from participating in this study. Potential benefits will include meaningful dialogues about the reasons why high school students drop out and the bonds that keep students in school, in order to better understand this problem and develop strategies to effectively deal with this problem in the United States. There will be approximately 60 other participants taking part in this research.

The results of this study will be included in different reports and articles, but names of people, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send you a copy in the future. If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at 914-422-2135, argarcia@jjay.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact **Professor Douglas Thompkins**, of John Jay College of Criminal Justice at **212-237-8000** and dthompkins@jjay.cuny.edu.

Initials of Participant: _____

By signing this form I certify that I have read the Informed Consent Form and being 18 years of age or older I agree to participate in the research project.

I have read the previous page of the Informed Consent Form and understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I understand that the interview will be tape-recorded. I understand that the principal researcher will maintain control over all tapes and that the tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. Further, I understand that I can refuse to answer any question at any time or terminate the interview at any time without penalty.

Date: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Consent to tape recording of interview

Please check one of the following. If a response is not selected I will not tape record the interview.

I do not mind if you tape record the interview. ☐

Please do not tape record the interview. ☐

Researcher: _____

Appendix 7 Themes*

School Culture/Attitude

- a. Teacher expectation
- b. Institutionalization of NYC schools
- c. Positive School Culture: High Achieving School
- e. Institutionalization of NYC Schools
- f. Appearance
- g. School culture (from students)
- h. School culture (from educators)
- i. Negative peer influences

School community's involvement

Cultural Differences & Demographic Differences: historical circumstances speak to issues of involuntary vs. voluntary immigration

Motivational Forces

- a. Parental Influence
- b. Peer Influence
- c. Community Involvement
- d. School Community
- e. Notion of Last Chance

Teacher Expectation

- a. Apathetic Teachers vs. Empowering Teachers
- b. Teacher involvement (Private vs. Public)
- c. Public vs. private school environment

Socially Constructed Ideas of Masculinity and Femininity

- a. Sex Differentials- More black Women Valuing Education than black Males

Barriers to Educational Success

- a. Negative peer influences
- b. Alternative Lifestyle once leave school
- c. Lack of Parental Involvement
- d. Presence of Gangs in Schools
- e. Instant Gratification
- f. Preparation / Skill levels
- g. Peer Pressure
- .

Racism

- a. Impact race plays in school: Teachers vs. Students
- b. Colorism
- c. Stereotypical thoughts on black males

Community Valuing Education

Black Males' Perception of Education and Success

- a. Opinions on code switching

Media's influence on the community

* The themes are not discussed in order.

Appendix 8
Statistics on Schools from Inside Schools, School Digger, & NYC DOE

<u>Attendance Rates</u>	
Hudson	44
Plain	59
Southern High	63
Atlantic	66
Midway High	69
Central	69
MARSHALL High	75
Basin	84
North Academy	87
Darwin Academy	91
Wake Academy	92
Cascade	95

<u>Regents Math A</u>		
Central	27	
MARSHALL High	33	
Southern High	35	
Atlantic	41	
Midway High	54	
Hudson	67	
Basin	75	
Darwin Academy	77	
Wake Academy	80	
Darwin Academy	81	
Cascade	85	
North Academy	91	

<u>Free % reduced price lunch</u>		
Cascade	0	
North Academy	56	
Hudson	58	
Basin	59	
Atlantic	65	
Darwin Academy	78	
MARSHALL High	80	
Plain	81	
Wake Academy	83	
Midway High	85	
Central	94	
Southern High	95	
<u>Regents English</u>		
MARSHALL High	16	
Central	33	
Southern High	37	
Atlantic	46	
Midway High	48	
Plain	48	
Darwin Academy	58	
Basin	79	
Wake Academy	85	
Cascade	93	
North Academy	94	

<u>Student Per Teacher</u>		
Central	15	
MARSHALL High	16	
Southern High	16	
Midway High	16	
Atlantic	18	
Wake Academy	18	
Basin	19	
Cascade	19	
Plain	20	
North Academy	22	
Darwin Academy	25	
No Hudson		

Ethnicity

School Name	Amer. Ind./ Alaskan Native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic	White
Plain Academy	<1%	<1%	85%	13%	1%
North Academy	<1%	<1%	83%	12%	1%
Wake Academy	1%	<1%	80%	17%	<1%
MARSHALL High	---	<1%	80%	17%	<1%
Cascade High School*	---	---	77%	13%	---
Hudson	---	1%	65%	3%	---
Atlantic Academy	<1%	2%	39%	54%	4%
Darwin Academy**	---	2%	38%	59%	3%
Central High	---	1%	37%	59%	3%
Midway High	<1%	2%	37%	59%	2%
Basin High	<1%	6%	33%	27%	33%
Southern High**	---	10%	29%	59%	4%

Appendix 9
Extracurricular Activities by School

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend. Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Central High School Approx. 600 students	Tutoring, John Jay College Now; Teen Talk Radio & TV; PM School; Extended Day Program; College Readiness Program; collaborations w/ local museums, etc. Total of 13 programs.	PSAL Sports; Dance classes, etc. Total of 6 activities	Local Health Clinic; College Readiness; John Jay College Now. Total of 3	Active PTA; New Parent Reception; student and parent workshops, Holiday Dinner; PTA Fundraiser	3 major crimes (property crimes), 4 other-crimes and 2 non-criminal incidents reported.	\$14,209	Verbal: 391 Math: 362

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend .Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
North Academy Approx. 900 students	Extended Day tutoring, Saturday Institute, Regents Prep., Theatre programs, cultural activities, Disaster Relief, SAT Prep, NYU Step & Best Program, etc. Total of 14	Boys / Girls Basketball, Baseball, Softball, Track, Soccer, Tennis, etc. Total of 9 teams Newspaper, Dance, Chess, Poetry, Golf, Cultural Music, Sewing, Debate, Book, Chorus, Equestrian, Student gov't, dance clubs, etc. 17 Clubs	Institute for Student Achievement, local universities, College Now, Medical Internship Program, local hospital, etc. Total of 10	Parental workshops conducted by parent coordinator and counselors.	No major crimes, 2 other-crimes and 4 non-criminal incidents reported.	\$9,539	Verbal: 447 Math: 466

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend. Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Marshall High Approx. 210 students.	Receive support from local community programs. 1 program	Sports teams: Basketball, baseball, and newspaper, etc. Total of 10	Partnered with the civil service bureau and College Now Program with John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Total of 3	PTA: Parent Coordinator	For a similar school: 1 major crime (crime against person), 8 other-crimes and 88 non-criminal incidents reported. <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>	For a similar school: \$11,055 <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>	For a similar school: Verbal: 391 Math: 396 <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Southern High Approx. 3,200 students.	Academic collaborations with local schools including John Jay College, Advanced Placement Courses, College Now, Law Program, Economics, etc. Total of 7	Chorus, AV Club, Debate, Drama, Golf, History, Key, Hispanic, Law, Mock Trial, ROTC, community service, Poetry, Student Government, Nat'l. Honor Society, etc. Total of 28	Local corporations and bank, tutoring programs, John Jay College, etc. Total of 5	Parent coordinator, Literacy, ESL and computer classes on weekends.	Under consolidated locations: 2 major crime (crime against persons), 9 other-crimes and 113 non-criminal incidents reported. <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>	\$9,641	Verbal: 388 Math: 407

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend. Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Wake Academy (WA) Approx. 190 students.	College tours and trips, PSAT, SAT Preparation, College Prep Saturday, Program. Total of 4 programs	Track and field, Chorus, Journalism Club/News-paper. Debate Team. Total of 5	Partnership with new school Initiatives, faith based leaders, and elected officials. Total of 3	PTA, School Leader-ship team, Fund-raising and Cultural Celebrations. Total of 4	Under consolidated locations: 14 other-crimes and 54 non-criminal incidents reported. <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>	For a similar school: \$11,055 <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>	For a similar school: Verbal: 391 Math: 396 <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend. Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Darwin Academy Approx. 350 students.	Saturday Program, Literacy skills, preparation for the Global, U.S. History, English, Regents exams. Total of 1 program	Special activities related to school's theme. Total of 3	Partnership with local community center, college counseling and summer employment, college fairs and visits, assistance with PSAT/SAT/ACT. Total of 6	Parents participate in year-end activities, hold bake and raffle sales, PTA meetings.	Under consolidated locations: 3 major crimes; (1 property crime and 2 crimes against persons), 23 other-crimes and 119 non-criminal incidents reported. <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>	\$15,263	Verbal: 382 Math: 423

	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend. Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Plain High Approx. 180 students.	College Now; Regents Prep, paid internships; Free SAT Preparation; Robotics; Forensic Science; Evening Classes; Student Government, College Tours; two school related special programs, community involvement, Projects; Honor Society; Study Abroad (South America & Africa; Anthropology; Ceramics; Independent Study Projects; Smartboard Technology; and student laptop use. Total of 17 programs	Student Ambassadors; school store; Chess Club; Chorus; Music; Dance and Drama Classes; Dance Team; Tennis; Mentoring; Peer Mediation; school newsletter; newspaper; Talent Show; Community Service; empowerment groups for young men; and Cultural, Health, and, Science College Fairs. Total of 18	Affiliations with local organization, e.g. Educators for Children Youth and Families; Teen Choice; College Now with two CUNY schools, one: John Jay College, and another local college; Model United Nations Program; Teen programs such as talk shows, radio, and science laboratory. Total of 8	Parent Coordinator educates parents, conducts workshops, skills, high school process, test prep, health workshops sponsored by la NYC university, Holiday family events; resume writing, sewing, and floral arrangemts. Total of 6	Under consolidated locations: 0 major crimes, 0 other-crimes and 5 non-criminal incidents reported. <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>	For a similar school: \$13,749 <i>There is no report that targets this school.</i>	Verbal: 340 Math: 360

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend Per Pupil (2004)	Average SAT Scores (2004)
Basin High School Approx. 2,600 students.	Scholarship, honors program; advanced placement (AP) courses; magnet programs, nursing and medical programs; performing arts, visual arts, business and computer programs, journalism, international programs, and human and legal studies. Total of 14 programs	Close to 30 varsity and junior varsity teams, Robotics Team, National Honor Society, Chess Club, black and Hispanic Awareness Clubs, Mock Trial, Drama, Jazz Band, Orchestra, Dance, Symphonic Band, School newspaper, yearbook, Math Team, Criminal Law and Justice Mentoring Program, Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution Programs. Total of 47	Partnership with local law firm, mentoring program partnering with local bank, local university, and hospital, engineering, and science program, career development, and global ambassador program. Total of 8	PTA meetings, PTA newsletters, School Leadership Team meetings, Principal's Council, Health Fair, HIV Aids awareness, the sports and performing arts parents clubs. Total of 8	2 major crime (crime against person), 17 other-crimes and 43 non-criminal incidents reported.	\$9,379	Verbal: 451 Math: 452

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend Per Pupil (2007)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Cascade High School (Approx. 400 students)	Advance Placement (AP) Courses (in 8 areas). Total of 1	Science, math, yearbook, investment, art, chess, culinary arts, dance, and Spanish heritage clubs. Total of 9 Student government, Newspaper, mentoring program, chorus, National Honor Society, tutoring, and ministry team. Total of 7	Alumni and local church organizations.	Structure workshops to develop self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-discipline for students and parents.	N/A	Tuition	Verbal: Math: N/A

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incidents	School Expend. Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Hudson Approx. 80 students (held as program & not a school) not subject to NCLB or same curriculum standards as other schools. Non-diploma granting program.	Staff collaborates with justice system. Tutoring, Court Employment Project (CEP), alternative to incarceration. Total of 4 programs	N/A	Local justice system.	Family involvement.	N/A	\$15,035	Verbal: N/A Math: N/A

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incident	School Expend. Per Pupil (2004)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Atlantic High School Approx. 900 students	Conflict Resolution, video documentary making, peer groups, interdisciplinary courses, arts curriculum, student leadership, technology enhanced curriculum and portfolio assessment. Total of 8	Basketball, softball, arts, web site design and technology. Total of 5	Partner with 4 local community organizations; partner with 2 local colleges, receives support from NYC's Theater Club, educational center, local council on arts, College Now, Conflict Resolution, Girls Career Workshop, local university writing and math projects. Total of 13	Satellite Academy considers parental involvement a key factor in the success of our students. We have a School Leadership Team and a Parents Association. Each student has an advisor who both the student and the parent know well.	N/A	\$11,511	Verbal: 371 Math: 370

School	Special Academic Programs	Extracurricular Activities	Community Support	Parent / School Support	Police Dept. Incident	School Expend Per Pupil (2005)	Average SAT Scores (2005)
Midway High Approx. 2000 students.	Support for regents' diploma. After-school classes, Saturday tutoring program; work-study, mentoring and apprenticeship opportunities are available, and College Now program. Total of 7	ROTC, Step cheerleading, health, and chess clubs; school newspaper, martial arts, entrepreneurship training, journalism club, mock trial, moot court team, peer mediation and conflict resolution activities, Basketball, baseball, volleyball, softball, track, and bowling teams. Total of 18	Partnerships, with 2 local magazines, a local law firm, mentoring program, Upward Bound, College Now, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and 2 specialty programs. Total of 8	PTA, School Leadership Team.	6 major crimes (1 crime against property, 5 crimes against person), 24 other-crimes and 37 non-criminal incidents reported.	\$10,111	Verbal: 393 Math: 401

Some characteristics of schools were removed not to allow for specific identification of sites in the study. Sources: *Private schools are not required to report data to the state; www.insideschools.org; www.greatschools.net from National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2005-2006; www.schooldigger.com.

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