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A critical ethnographic study of the sociological and educational factors that contribute to scholastic disengagement prior to adolescence and the nexus to the school to prison pipeline

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Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SCHOLASTIC DISENGAGEMENT PRIOR TO

ADOLESCENCE AND THE NEXUS TO THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

David Diehl

February 2020

Martine Jago, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

David Diehl

Under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to, and accepted by the graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Cheri, our three children Jessica, David, and John, along with my parents for allowing me to think my decisions over the past 11 years were relatively sane and achievable, while respecting my innate stubbornness to pursue a career in education. The challenges that our family faced as a result of my decision to become an educator, along with the pursuit of higher education, have certainly been consequential. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and support. I love you!

As a child, my exposure to the effects that addiction can have on a family helped prepare me to be a more empathic law enforcement officer in a career that spanned nearly a quarter of a century; however, when addiction touched my own child, I, along with the rest of our family, was totally unprepared and devastated. Personally, it caused me to experience feelings of anger, shame, and grief. However, this process allowed me to see others, especially those who were suffering, from a different vantage point.

During this educational pursuit and opportunity to work with incarcerated students who themselves have faced adverse experiences, they, along with my daughter's struggles and her resilience, became the inspiration for this research. I am honored to dedicate this work to these wise adolescents who have taught me more than any degree of formal education could have provided.

The final decision to begin this journey was put into motion by the then incarcerated student who told me,

> Mr. Diehl, you get us, and I know you care about us, but it's too late. I'm already in (the gang lifestyle) and I'm not getting out. Write a book or something so that you can help

people understand how to help us before we get involved. I didn't want to take this path.

If things would have been different, I wouldn't be here. You gotta help us a lot earlier.

My hope is that this research will be able to provide additional insight that may help reduce the

number of individuals entering the criminal justice system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my professors from Pepperdine's Educational Leadership Academy Master's Degree program: Dr. Barner, Dr. Rumack, Dr. Lund, and Dr. Jackson, who modeled transformational leadership, exuded the utmost professionalism, and caused me to realize that learning never ends, and whose support gave me the confidence to pursue this Doctorate at Pepperdine University, thank you!

To the awesome Cohort 13, along with Dr. Baca, Dr. Purrington, Dr. McGee, Dr. Randall Lindsey, and Dr. Delores Lindsey, I can't thank you enough and am so very fortunate to have been enlightened and become better prepared to serve our students through this experience.

To the last two members of my "mini cohort," Michele and Cristina, thank you for the constant love and support these past 4 years!

To the participants in this study, thank you for your candor and willingness to share your experiences with me.

To my dissertation committee members, Dr. Jay Jackson and Dr. Randall Lindsey, thank you for taking the time to serve on this committee and provide encouragement and valuable feedback.

Last, but certainly not least, I cannot thank Dr. Martine Jago enough for your extraordinary support, expert advice, and unwavering encouragement. I still can't believe I was fortunate enough to have you as a professor and then as my chairperson through this wonderful and unforgettable learning experience. Clearly, it would not have been the same without you. Thank you!

VITA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this critical ethnographic study was to examine the lived experiences of formerly

or currently incarcerated, Hispanic males who attended elementary school in Central Coast

County (pseudonym), and affiliated, or previously affiliated with, one of the two major Mexican

gangs in the State of California. This study sought to investigate what influence or impact, if

any, a student's educational experience prior to entering middle school may have on a desire to

become involved with the gang culture. The unusually high teenage homicide rate occurring in a

non-urban setting has garnered national attention. Teachers, school administrators, a probation

officer, counselors, a defense attorney, and a retired superior court judge were

interviewed. Lived experiences of Hispanic gang members in Southern California, recorded in

two recent research projects, were analyzed. The primary research question was: What role, if

any, does school disengagement have on a student's entrance into the School to Prison Pipeline?

A cross-sectional approach was used for the semi-structured interviews, field observations, and

document analysis. The data revealed five themes, *Environment, Interventions, Belonging,*

Caring Adults and *Self Worth.* The themes surfaced from the interviews, document analysis, and

observations, which were guided by the overarching research question.

Three conclusions resulted from the analysis and interpretation of findings from the

study. Firstly, environmental factors play an extremely significant role in a student's life

trajectory as this uncontrollable element cannot be controlled by the child. Secondly, cultural

awareness for educators is deficient in the area of understanding street socialized youth. Lastly,

increased effectuality by educational staff for the early recognition and implementation of

effective interventions is crucial in early childhood. This study highlights the need for educators

to receive increased training to expand their understanding of students who are socialized in low

socioeconomic environments where gangs and violence are present. Additionally, improved

school wide efficacy is required for the timely identification of students needing specific

interventions, along with continuous systems of support. Through these measures, school

connectedness will likely increase and create a barrier that should be embraced by all: one that

stifles and impedes the entrance into the criminal justice system.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the ensuing study, background information, the problem statement, purpose statement, theoretical framework, research questions, definitions, limitations and delimitations, assumptions, and a positionality statement, followed by the organization of the study, and a chapter summary. This chapter will discuss and examine the potential factors that contribute to the school to prison pipeline through a critical ethnographic methodology and a critical theory framework. The intention of this study was to offer a position for analysis that will consider the relationship between sociological factors that intertwine with current educational practices and philosophies in public schools. This study examined current teaching practices and educational policies that serve youth who are socialized in geographical areas that are marginalized, predominantly Latino, and prone to gang violence in a Central California county. The unique aspect of this research is the significant and continuous level of Latino youth gang violence that continues to occur and has drawn national attention. This study sought to explore the role the educational system can play in reducing youth gang affiliation and the potential entrance into the juvenile justice system as a result of this affiliation. The researcher asserts that entrance into the juvenile justice system is the catalyst that appreciably increases a juvenile's chances of adult incarceration, harm, or both, thereby reducing their chance of achieving equitable post-secondary educational opportunities, future employment, and societal acceptance. The nexus among pre-adolescent educational experiences is examined as a means to identify the contributing circumstances and reduce gang affiliation. This research sought to discern proactive methods to diminish violence, entry into the juvenile justice system, and potential adult incarceration. This researcher's unique life and career experiences as a former law

enforcement officer, court school educator, father of a recovering addict, and assistant principal of a continuation high school offer a perspective that may be able to enlighten those in a number of positions who have the capacity to impact or converge with youth from marginalized communities.

Background of the Study

During the past four decades, the U.S. educational system has experienced school massacres, appalling dropout rates, and significant racial inequities. Consequently, various measures have been taken to rectify these issues and provide safeguards for students' safety. One of these strategies was the institution of a zero-tolerance policy. Initially, this policy was specifically designed to address the possession of a weapon by a student, mandating unequivocal consequences in the form of an expulsion; however, that policy began to morph into a much broader interpretation of what was acceptable in many school districts (Devoe et al., 2004). As a result, the use of negative consequences which included removal from the classroom, suspension, and expulsion has increased significantly causing students to become excluded, disengaged, and labeled unfairly (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). As the financial resources of school districts dwindled and classroom sizes increased, teachers lacked the classroom management skills necessary to handle many of the students they were tasked to instruct, leading to the disparate levy of negative disciplinary consequences to minority students (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Suspensions and removal from school became common consequences for students who were accused of the subjective offenses of defiance, disrespect, or insubordination. Black and Latino students are suspended at a much more frequent rate than their White peers (Martinez, 2009).

The ACLU maintains that a school to prison pipeline (STPP) exists within the United States educational system whereby students are forced out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. A body of research asserts that the entry into the STPP occurs as a result of some form of disciplinary consequence that occurs at school, which in turn leads the student to be remanded to the juvenile justice system, potentially resulting in continued monitoring and supervision within the juvenile justice system. Prior research indicates that students of color who emanate from marginalized communities are at greater risk of being targeted for infractions and may be turned over to law enforcement authorities. Students begin to experience contact with law enforcement within the school system more frequently once they enter middle and high school.

Over 80% of all incarcerated juveniles and adults have experienced some level of academic failure, including, but not limited to, dropping out of school (Sander, 2010). In 2015 over 700,000 teenagers in the United States dropped out of high school. School children who receive heightened punishment are more likely to drop out, are less likely to be employed, and face a greater risk of incarceration (Kupchik, 2010). According to the Prison Policy Initiative, over 1.3 million people are incarcerated in state or federal prisons in the United States. This number does not take into account the 650,000 people who are awaiting trial in county jails or are serving short term sentences for less serious offenses. Teenagers' association with criminal street gangs increases their chance of arrest and entrance into the criminal justice system (Gilman, Hill, & Hawkins, 2014). The National Youth Gang Survey Analysis conducted in 2012 by the National Gang Center (n.d.) found that at the time there were over 850,000 gang members in the United States; however, a study by Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015) asserted that there are over 1,000,000 gang members between the ages of 5-17. Many of these juveniles exit out of the gang

while new members are indoctrinated, indicating that the number of juveniles who have been in a gang at some point is significantly higher. This staggering number of teens affiliated with gangs is at risk of becoming incarcerated in one of the nation's correctional facilities.

Student disengagement can compound, aggravate, and become a factor that leads to a variety of adverse results that drain scarce resources and further degradation of marginalized neighborhoods. Students from marginalized communities cite school disengagement as a factor in their joining or associating with a youth gang. Students from marginalized communities are at greater risk for gang affiliation due to ecological and social constructs within the neighborhoods in which they are raised. Consequently, the associated violence of youth gangs has a negative impact on communities, families, and academic achievement (National Gang Center, n.d.).

Significant research has been conducted on student disengagement within urban school settings, as well as the trajectory of students who become entangled in gangs and the ensuing consequences of this lifestyle. However, this study was designed to focus on one Central California county, whose county seat is an agricultural town (hereafter referred to as Ag Town) and is a community of less than 150,000 residents. This community, and smaller towns within a 40-mile radius, have been plagued by gang violence. For the past 50 years, Ag Town has been the epicenter for gang violence that has spread to other towns within this 40-mile radius. This county, which partially borders the Pacific Coast, is hereinafter referred to as Central Coast County. Central Coast County, which boasts world-class hotels and dining on the coastal side of the county, has over 5,000 certified and affiliated gang members, of whom 3,000 are believed to reside in Ag Town.[1] Ag Town is geographically proximate to a California penal institution that claims to be the birthplace where one of the two major Mexican prison gangs originated

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[1] The source for this material would reveal the identity of the participating institution. Therefore, it has been omitted intentionally to protect the subjects' confidentiality.

(Mendoza, 2012), Since many members of the rival gang, who are also predominantly Latino, reside in this city, the hatred that permeates the prison yards has carried over to the streets of this otherwise quiet community. The resulting violence that plagues the streets of Ag Town and its neighboring communities has been a major concern for the region. Central Coast County has either led or has been one of the top-ranking California counties for gang-related youth homicides since 2011. The Violence Policy Center has ranked Central Coast County the youth homicide capital of California for 4 out of the 5 years between 2010 and 2015.[2]

In 2013, Ag Town led the state with 23.8 youth homicides per 100,000. The gang related homicides and associated violence have acquired significant attention, with various federal, state, and local committees and task forces being formed to address this issue; however, the strategies are predominantly geared toward post-gang affiliation, thereby creating a reactive approach. The proactive and preventative role that the local school districts can contribute in the reduction of violence has not been studied. Many of the interventions that are currently in place, or that have been conducted previously, have focused on the youth who have already entered the criminal justice system and associated with one of two local street gangs. Pre-gang intervention strategies through the local school districts have not been implemented, with the exception of the law enforcement sponsored gang prevention program known as GREAT, which has since been discontinued. Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) claims to be an evidence-based gang and violence prevention program taught by police officers within local schools. It was designed to prevent gang affiliation for children before they reach the ages deemed most susceptible for introduction into gangs (Gang Resistance Education and Training, n.d.)

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[2] The source for this material would reveal the identity of the participating institution. Therefore, it has been omitted intentionally to protect the subjects' confidentiality.

Little to no research has been conducted to ascertain what impact, if any, teacher-initiated strategies or school-based interventions can have on deterring or altering a juvenile's path into gang affiliation and the criminal justice system. Since gang membership occurs at an age when juveniles are typically enrolled in school, it is suggested that the school itself may be complicit in a student's entrance into the criminal justice system. The purpose of this study was to investigate what influence or impact, if any, a student's educational experience, specifically in grades pre-kindergarten through six, may have on their desire to affiliate, associate, or otherwise become involved with the gang culture, thereby triggering the STPP. Due to the significant number of high school dropouts, teens becoming involved in gangs, and the number of Americans that become incarcerated in the United States, this study strove to bring to light interventions and best practices that may potentially reduce these numbers.

Problem Statement

Adolescent gang members often begin their affiliation with a criminal street gang between the ages of 12-15 (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). Alienation from the educational setting has been cited as a factor that causes marginalized youth to disengage from school. Disengagement from the educational setting can lead impressionable youth who are approaching adolescence to seek out environments or peers that will accept them and give them a sense of purpose and belonging. For many students, the relationships they develop with school staff can be some of the most significant relationships they encounter in their lives. Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, and Lehr (2004) and Cramer, Gonzalez, and Pellegrini-Lafont (2014) suggested that students can begin to feel disengaged from the school culture as early as elementary school, which can be the catalyst for the STPP (Osher et al., 2012). According to Croninger and Lee (2001), disengagement can begin as early as first grade.

Understanding the factors that cause some students to feel alienated or detached from the social and educational setting that the school provides requires further study as these perceived factors of exclusion may lead to the decision to affiliate with gangs and participate in gang activity. Many interventions have shown to be reactive as opposed to proactive when a student has begun displaying significant delinquent behavior within the school or is arrested and referred to juvenile justice system. Unfortunately, the interventions become exclusionary and are designed to separate the misbehaving student from the comprehensive setting. These placements often result in the student's placement in an alternative educational setting, typically referred to as a Community Day School, or Court School. These schools are designed to serve students in middle and high school, a time when students are more likely to choose gang affiliation.

Since the vast majority of teens in the United States who are currently associating with a gang have attended a public school beginning in pre-kindergarten, educators stand to benefit significantly from the first hand perspectives of the youth who have become involved in gang life. Unlike the STPP theory that focuses on school-imposed discipline policies and procedures and their effect on minority students' path to prison, this study focused on the ecological factors, educational classroom management strategies, teacher-student relationships, and teachers' pedagogical philosophies that may enhance or reduce student disengagement, thereby creating a means to make educators aware of potential overt or covert actions that lead to disengagement. Adolescents who have been excluded from the typical educational experience could become more likely to affiliate with street gangs, exposing themselves as potential targets for violence or as potential candidates to be asked to carry out violent assaults on rival gang members. Gang affiliation creates significant antagonizing factors such as incarceration, violence, and drug use. Disengagement from the educational system is an associated factor that can be exacerbated by

teacher bias, hyper-criminalization, and street socialization (Rios, 2011). The teen homicide rate in the Central Coast County as a result of a feud between the two rival gangs has become a recognized crisis and viable alternatives and intervention strategies need to be examined.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate what influence or impact, if any, a student's educational experience prior to entering middle school may have on their desire to affiliate, associate, or otherwise become involved with the gang culture, via the analysis of interviews regarding lived educational experiences of formerly incarcerated males who currently affiliate or have formerly affiliated with gangs. In addition, interviews with elementary teachers, school counselors, school administrators, probation officers, and members of the judicial system were also conducted. The objective of this study was to bring to light emergent interventions, practices, and policies by K-6 educational institutions that may enhance student engagement and reduce alienation in order to maximize the influence the teacher and school setting can have on reducing gang affiliation and the incarceration of juveniles. Detailed personal history accounts, along with interviews of various other stakeholders, were analyzed to allow insight and clarity into these individuals' academic paths and offer school administrators and classroom teachers a perspective that is currently not present in teacher credentialing programs or professional development.

Importance of the Study

This study is important because research has shown that children can experience significant social-emotional, physical, and familial issues during the time when they are beginning to transition from elementary school to middle school (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Teachers bring their socialization and value system into the classroom as a result of their

childhood experiences and upbringing. Through the traditional educational process, school policies and teacher practices merge with the student's socialization and inherent perspectives on proper behavior, creating a need to investigate the ensuing and unavoidable amalgamation of potentially incongruent belief systems. It is necessary to examine classroom management and behavior intervention strategies, the value of student-teacher relationships, and the desirable disposition elementary school educators who serve students in marginalized communities because teachers' actions can have long lasting effects on their students' self-efficacy, self-worth, and ability to make healthy choices. Addressing the issue of gang affiliation, risky behavior, violence, and relationship to student inclusion and engagement within a school system requires the collaboration of all stakeholders within a community. Educators and their relationship within the cycle of prevention and proactive measures to reduce at-risk behavior must be considered in preventive strategies. Long-term strategies may not attain immediate results; however, the importance of involving educators in this process is necessary for any viable, long-term, sustainable prevention strategies to succeed. Acquiring a better understanding of how the elementary school setting can prevent or inhibit a student's desire to satisfy particular needs through gang affiliation and at-risk behavior would be beneficial to the efforts currently in place to reduce gang violence and stifle the STPP. There is very little research that provides first hand perspectives from marginalized youth regarding the effect, or potential effect, of the elementary school environment on their choice to engage in gang affiliation or criminal activity.

Conchas and Vigil (2012) suggested further research be conducted by educators to develop and integrate strategies to address the educational and emotional needs of street-socialized youth within the classroom and school environment. They posited that current practices seek to suppress and exclude street-socialized youth as they progress through the

educational system and their behavior becomes more difficult to address. Conventional

interventions and strategies have not proven successful or appropriate for this demographic.

Currently, there is little research that addresses teacher education or proven practices that may be

helpful in deterring or inhibiting young Latino youth from becoming involved in criminal street

gangs prior to the age of 14. The STPP may begin much earlier than currently asserted and may

have more to do with classroom educators and school culture than previously assumed. With the

significant number of students who are being incarcerated, psychologically affected, oppressed,

and injured as a result of gang affiliation, it is essential that educators recognize their culpability

in this travesty.

A potential outcome of this study is the acquisition of a potential framework that will add

to the current literature on culturally competent classroom management and instructional

practices and address the specific needs of street socialized youth emerging from neighborhoods

whose ecological conditions contribute to the attraction of a lifestyle that fills the void caused by

their educational environment. This research will offer school administrators valuable data on

the importance of teacher-student relationships and the emotional role that teachers play in

students' lives, which, in turn, can influence hiring practices, school culture, professional

development, and pre-service induction programs.

Definitions of Terms

- *School Connectedness*: The degree to which a student feels connected, accepted, and
  wanted within the school he/she attends.
- *Cultural Competence*: Having a proficient understanding of a student's cultural
  experiences, family values, and socialization as it relates to the community in which
  he/she resides.

- *DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education):* A 16-week curriculum taught by uniformed police officers to either fifth or sixth grade students.

- *GREAT Gang Resistance Education and Training:* An eight-lesson curriculum taught by uniformed police officers to middle school students over a 9-week period (Peterson & Esbensen, 2004).

- *Juvenile Offender:* "A child or young person under the age of 18 who has been found guilty of some offence, act of vandalism, or antisocial behavior before a juvenile court" ("Offender," n.d., para. 5).

- *Proposition 21:* Under Prop 21, juveniles 14 years of age or older charged with committing certain types of murder or a serious sex offense are generally no longer eligible for juvenile court and may receive sentencing under adult guidelines (Taylor, 2001).

- *Correctional System:* "Federal and state criminal justice systems most commonly use the term 'corrections' as the replacement for 'penology' when referring to the network of agencies that supervise individuals in a state of incarceration, rehabilitation, parole or probation" (Correctional Officer.org, n.d., para. 1).

- *School to Prison Pipeline (STPP):* A disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.).

- *Street Socialization:* The socialization that occurs to youth from low-income, marginalized communities (Conchas & Vigil, 2012).

- *Hyper-Criminalization:* Treating everyday behaviors and styles as deviant, risky, threatening, or criminal across social contexts (Rios, 2011).

- *Street Gang:* "A group of three or more people, having a primary activity of commission of one or more of the predicate crimes, having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol whose members engage in a pattern of criminal gang activity" (Federal District Appellate Project Wiki, n.d., para. 1)

- *Prison Gang:* This term is used to refer to different types of gang activity inside prisons or correctional facilities. Prison gangs are criminal organizations that originated within the U.S. prison system.

- *Marginalized Community:* "Socially excluded groups of people for different reasons, such as age, physical or mental disabilities, economic status, access to education, or live in isolated places or depressed areas" (IGI Global, n.d., para. 1).

- *Juvenile Justice System:* Juvenile justice is the area of criminal law applicable to persons not old enough to be held responsible for criminal acts. In most states, the age for criminal culpability is set at 18 years.

- *Zero Tolerance:* A strict policy within the school system that mandates specific exclusionary consequences for certain rule violations.

Theoretical Framework

This research was guided by the theoretical framework of critical theory; however, the methodology of this study was developed through the lens of critical ethnography. Madison (2005) maintained that critical ethnography studies marginalized groups with the intent of bringing to light social injustices on their behalf and voicing concern for their particular oppression. The strategy was to conduct a critical ethnographic study of lived experiences of incarcerated, gang affiliated Latino youth, as well as the multitude of county and school district

personnel that could provide perspective into this dilemma that is currently being addressed and influenced through a law enforcement framework.

Critical theory has varied meanings in the realm of philosophy and the within the application of the social sciences. Critical theory has taken on a variety of applications and has been applied in different time frames throughout its history, beginning in 1929, at the Institute of Social Research. Horkheimer (as cited in Bohman, 2016) maintained that critical theory must meet three criteria; it must be "explanatory, practical, and normative" (para. 1). Researchers who choose to perform studies though the vantage point of critical theory desire to explore the realm of social justice and democracy through an approach that allows for the consideration of various paradigms. Giroux (2003) posited that any critical theory is explained by the dilemma it elucidates and strives to convey some form of meaningful understanding. Through critical theory, the analysis of a multitude of frameworks related to sociology, criminology, psychology, and educational philosophies, will be probed. Interviews and observations will be conducted with the diverse and assorted members whose experiences and beliefs influence the personal trajectories of the youth in this Central Coast County.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that guided this study was as follows: What role, if any, does school disengagement have on a student's entrance into the school to prison pipeline? Several sub-questions arose during the review of the literature:

1. What are educators' beliefs regarding best practices for culturally relevant classroom management and pedagogy in schools located in marginalized regions of Central Coast County?

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2. To what extent might the classroom culture, relationships, and classroom management strategies employed by teachers affect student engagement?

3. How do currently or formerly incarcerated Latino males who claim affiliation with gangs or have been identified by the criminal justice systems as a gang member perceive the effect, if any, that their pre-kindergarten through sixth grade educational experiences had on their affiliation with a criminal street gang or entrance into the criminal justice system?

4. What do various individuals who work within the juvenile justice system, social workers, school counselors, believe are the significant causes or factors, if any, that lead a juvenile to become involved with a criminal street gang?

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the number of individuals who were able to participate. In order to conduct interviews from the multiple perspectives of stakeholders and individuals who are or were formerly affiliated with a youth gang, the number of participants had to be limited to a manageable number. Based on his experience in law enforcement and his familiarity with the culture of street gangs, this researcher was aware that gang leadership might have deterred individuals who affiliate with gangs from participating in this study. Another limitation in interviewing those affiliated with street gangs are the restrictions and regulations imposed by the detention facilities if they are currently incarcerated.

The desired sample size was four formerly or currently gang affiliated individuals who attended school in Central Coast County, four teachers, two school administrators, one probation officer, and one attorney who has both criminal defense and prosecutorial experience in Central Coast County. An additional limitation was the individuals' ability to recall events accurately

when asked to reflect on their pre-kindergarten through sixth grade experience due to the time that has elapsed.

Delimitations

This study was limited to a 40-mile radius of Ag Town, which is located in the State of California. Only those who attended or taught in schools within Central Coast County were interviewed. Participants who hold various roles within the educational system or social ecological environment of Central Coast County were interviewed, as this study's focus was on elements within this particular county. A qualitative method was employed in this study because it afforded this researcher the ability to probe and inquire through semi-structured questions, eliciting rich details of the participants' personal and lived experiences. The participants were able to offer a multitude of perspectives for this study that investigated the various factors in a youth's educational path that can influence or deter the desire to consider gang affiliation.

Assumptions

The nature of research is such that assumptions will be made. The following assumptions were made in conducting this study:

1. The data provided by participants were accurate.

2. All participants in this study communicated honestly and accurately, to the best of their recollection and ability.

3. Participants recognized their bias, or potential for bias, and responded appropriately.

4. The information gleaned from this study would add to current research and be of value to educators, administrators, and instructors of teacher candidates.

Positionality

As a researcher, my personal and professional experiences need to be understood in the context of this study. As a lifelong resident of the county where the study took place, I have an understanding of the many nuances and subtle factors that may not be apparent to someone who has not been fortunate to reside in this community. My path to this inquiry can most likely be traced, at least partially, to my own childhood experiences as a student. My educational journey was supported by at least one adult who took an interest in my personal life and did not judge or lecture me on my transgressions. If it not were for the supportive adults who came into my life at the most critical moments, my story might certainly have had a different ending. As a result, I have felt compelled to lean toward helping students who are labeled as troubled or at-risk. This calling has seemed to be a most natural for path for me. I turned out to be gainfully employed and have given back to my community on a daily basis, not only as a police officer, but also as a concerned citizen, husband, and parent of three children. In my professional experience, I spent the first 24 years of my adult working life with as a peace officer in a local police department. My positions included patrol officer, narcotic task force investigator, detective, DARE officer, field training officer, police academy instructor, patrol sergeant, and detective sergeant.

During my last 3 years of employment, my eldest daughter began a path of drug addiction that began in her sophomore year of high school. This often-misunderstood illness rapidly led her to the use of methamphetamine and opiates. Over the following 12 years she had periods of sobriety, yet many of those years have been spent in the depths of addiction to an insidious drug. She has endured significant trauma in many forms, in details that have not been specifically conveyed to me, which is most likely best for my own sanity. Early into her addiction, I experienced a broken heart, anger, humiliation, and helplessness. These emotions morphed into

the desire to help others through a position as an educator, causing me to leave the police force at the age of 44 and become a public school teacher. My position in the law enforcement profession allowed me to gain a firsthand look at how the multitude of events and experiences in one's life often dictated the trajectory that stifled one's ability to lead a productive existence. Little did I know, I would end up naturally gravitating to the students who were deemed unruly. Later, I worked in a County Detention Facility School teaching some of the most resilient and respectful young men and women I have ever encountered. My perspective was exponentially enhanced as I began teaching incarcerated students who shared their personal narratives with me. I have watched adolescents struggle in school due to discipline-related matters and be labeled, charged, and pushed into alternative educational environments. Teaching students who had been unnecessarily labeled gang members, interacting with adolescents who were being tried as adults, and losing several of my students to gang related homicides have fueled my passion for this undertaking. As one of my students commented just days before leaving for a 7-year sentence for attempted homicide, "Mr. Diehl, you get us, you understand us, but it's too late for us. You need to write a book or something so people can help us before we end up here." My current position is an Assistant Principal in a Continuation High School that serves many of the youth that reside in the coastal communities of the county where this research was conducted. This attestation lends credibility to my research, as I have spent over a quarter of a century of gaining a personal, first-hand view of circumstances that can contribute to the STPP.

Organization of the Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 describes the societal factors and educational practices that may have an influence on the stated problem. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature and conceptual frameworks that were examined through critical theory

as a means to explore the sociological and ecological forces that intersect with the educational

practice within public schools located in a region plagued by juvenile gang violence. Chapter 3

describes the qualitative research design that was employed in this study, participants, the data

collection procedures, instrumentation, analysis, and protection of human subjects. Chapter 4

presents the findings of the study derived from the participant interviews. These findings are

categorized into themes that inform the findings. Chapter 5 offers an overview and synopsis of

the study in its totality, along with a discussion of the key findings, implications, conclusions,

and recommendations from the study.

Chapter Summary

This study explored the lived educational experiences of former or current affiliates of a

street gang in Central Coast County. In conjunction with the qualitative interviews of these

individuals, the study explored other sociological forces, such as the perceptions of members of

the juvenile justice system and educational policies and practices that may either impede or

enhance their life trajectory. Previously recorded lived experiences of former or current gang

members were also analyzed through document analysis to augment the research. The goal of

this research was to provide greater insight for educators and those who interact with street-

socialized youth who reside in a community that is greatly influenced by the effects of gang

violence.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the grounds for the examination of the elementary school educational experience of predominantly Latino youth from marginalized communities in a county located in the region of Central California. It begins with the historical background of gangs in the United States and is followed by the circumstances and events that have led to the gang phenomenon in Central Coast County. The chapter continues with the rationale for this critical ethnographic study in a county that has received national attention for its per capita juvenile homicide rate. The majority of the murder victims, as well as those arrested for the assaults, are Latino males who pledge their allegiance to one of two major prison gangs. Since many of the responses to this problem have been driven from a reactive, law enforcement approach, this chapter will then examine strategies that are preventive in nature and can address the needs of the youth through a culturally competent pedagogical lens. Through this paradigm shift, the abundance of risk factors that marginalized youth incur and the manner in which teachers can understand its effect on behavior, engagement, and inclusiveness as a strategy to combat gang affiliation will be taken into account. As the foundation of the loosely defined STPP is explored (Skiba & Knesting, 2001), this study sought to probe the importance of school engagement and the crucial role elementary educators play in maintaining school connectedness. Since most youth choose to affiliate with a gang between the ages of 12-15 (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015), it is reasonable to assess the significance of teacher relationships, student perceived engagement, culturally competent classroom management, and a teacher's understanding of their students' socialization. The research involving the pre-kindergarten through sixth grade school experience and the potential effect of disengagement has been previously studied; however, its

effect on youth affiliation with street gangs and the infusion into the STPP is limited. The relationship between marginalized students' sociological factors that integrate with current educational behavior management strategies, coupled with a teacher's disposition and belief system, has not been analyzed from this perspective. The literature review will assess the significance of the numerous elements that are set into motion when a student enters the classroom community, as this condition has not been examined in this fashion.

Context

The purpose of this study was to learn from the lived experiences of individuals who have resided in Central Coast County and affiliated with one of the two primary street gangs in the county. The perspective of elementary school teachers, school administrators, probation officers, social workers, counselors, criminal defense attorneys, and a retired superior court judge were also examined through a critical ethnographic form of inquiry. The conceptual framework was addressed through a critical theory perspective; however, several theories that stem from the educational and sociological disciplines were compared and contrasted to enhance the overarching understanding of the culture clash that often occurs between street socialized youth and well-meaning, yet potentially uninformed, teachers.

The overarching research question that guided this study was as follows: What role, if any, does school disengagement have on a student's entrance into the school to prison pipeline? Several sub-questions arose during the review of the literature:

1. What are educators' beliefs regarding best practices for culturally relevant classroom management and pedagogy in schools located in marginalized regions of Central Coast County?

2. To what extent might the classroom culture, relationships, and classroom management strategies employed by teachers affect student engagement?

3. How do currently or formerly incarcerated Latino males who claim affiliation with gangs or have been identified by the criminal justice systems as a gang member perceive the effect, if any, that their pre-kindergarten through sixth grade educational experiences had on their affiliation with a criminal street gang or entrance into the criminal justice system?

4. What do various individuals who work within the juvenile justice system, social workers, school counselors, believe are the significant causes or factors, if any, that lead a juvenile to become involved with a criminal street gang?

Conceptual Framework

Critical theory. Constructing a conceptual framework that can capture the complex dynamics that occur between the external and internal factors that may influence the trajectory of marginalized youth within the current scholastic structure in Central Coast County required the use of a variety of epistemologies. As such, critical theory was the overarching viewpoint used to assemble a conceptual framework for this study. Critical theory stipulates that the exploration of social justice and democracy can be undertaken from a viewpoint that affords the researcher the ability to consider a variety of frameworks. Giroux (2003) maintained that any critical theory is explained by the dilemma it elucidates and strives to convey some form of meaningful understanding. Through a critical ethnographic methodology and the application of a heterogeneous assortment of sociological, psychological, and educational frameworks, this researcher laid the foundation for research that was analyzed and interpreted in this study.

Ecological systems theory. As part of the process to gain insight into the experiences that shape student's perception of their educational experience, their feeling of connectedness to their school, and their subsequent relationship with teacher, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory illustrates environmental influences that either directly or indirectly affect a child as enters the educational environment. Although Bronfenbrenner added a fifth dimension in his most recent model, the chronosystem, this study utilized the second version. This model incorporates four ecological systems that encircle the child. These influences are defined as the macrosystem, or society, the exosystem, or institutions, the mesosystem, or family, and at the center, the microsystem, the child. These influences that affect the student may also affect the student's teacher, shaping their perspectives, values, biases, and the manner in which they view culturally competent pedagogy and classroom management. Ecological systems theory also accounts for what Bronfenbrenner referred to as bidirectional influences. For instance, the teachers can influence the child, and in turn, the child can influence the teacher.

The macrosystem, which is the largest concentric layer surrounding the child, relates to the norms and values under which one lives. Depending on the time and place, this can naturally cause obstacles or be of benefit, depending on the child's individual circumstance. In the realm of education and marginalized, minority youth, the level of cultural proficiency of the school system as a whole can be impactful.

The exosystem is the next level of influence in the system, which encompasses the societal framework that can influence, although not directly, a person's access to systems that have either positive or negative effects. Law enforcement, community parks, municipal or county resources, and housing availability factor into this component of the system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The next layer of the system is the mesosystem. Like the ecosystem, it could involve the child's neighborhood, law enforcement, and/or the school; however, this system specifically encompasses the firsthand interaction between child and a societal component of the system. For instance, a child who resides in an affluent neighborhood would have vastly different interactions with law enforcement, access to local parks, safe neighborhood interactions, and types of housing than that of the child who resides in a marginalized community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The last element of the system is the microsystem, which addresses interactions with people who are closest and most visible to the child. These interpersonal interactions include those that occur with the family, siblings, and immediate friends. It is at this level that the bidirectional influence is most remarkable (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model is an extremely valid and worthy theory to address the influence or impact through an ecological paradigm; however, it does not expressly articulate the multitude of variables that could convey opportunities for more specific and critical examination of social ecological system in a marginalized community. Therefore, to facilitate this research, additional perspectives were incorporated to provide a more complete and holistic framework.

Multiple Marginality Theory

Multiple marginality is a particularly useful theoretical framework in the analysis of the potential factors that cause marginalized youth to become susceptible to affiliating or joining a criminal street gang (Vigil, 2002). Similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological theory, the multiple marginality framework considers the multitude of pressures within the ecological, economic, and sociocultural system underserved youth encounter on a daily basis. Multiple marginality theory expands on the social ecology theory and includes forces such as racism, social and cultural repression, and the social psychological factors that can contribute to a youth

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of Mexican descent's decision to seek affirmation and acceptance from a street gang. Macrohistorical and microstructural forces create circumstances that can affect the youth in marginalized communities. These influences have a cumulative effect that can be not only overt, but also subversive.

According to Conchas and Vigil (2012) academic disengagement is a consequence of marginalization. Educational disenfranchisement contributes to a youth's quest to find acceptance, as well as to exert a level of control as he/she enters adolescence. The multiple marginality framework encompasses the identification of how a youth becomes socialized within their marginalized communities. As Conchas and Vigil explained, street socialization occurs most often for youth who lack supervision and reside in living conditions that are less than ideal, causing them to retreat to public areas. Socializing in the street becomes the avenue for adopting a value system that may not be congruent with the acceptable norms of mainstream society. Although the percentage of youth who join gangs has varying estimates, ranging from 15% in the Seattle Gang Study (Hill, Howell, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999) to 31% in the Rochester Study (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Tobin, & Smith, 2003), of those who do report gang membership, most share common characteristics and become highly dependent on each other. The desire to receive attention from their peer group becomes a significant component as they enter puberty and begin the coming of age process. The fight against various common enemies can materialize in many perceived entities. For instance, the rival street gang, law enforcement, parental control, and the educational system, become foes of the gang, thereby fulfilling a sense of purpose.

One of the significant strengths of this framework as it relates to the nexus of preadolescent educational disengagement and the nexus to the STPP is its ability to allow for

flexibility in the critical examination of the educational system, social controls, and the criminal justice system. Conchas and Vigil (2012) suggested that multiple marginality theory allows for the comparison between youth who have succumbed to the gang life, as well as those who have achieved success regardless of their environment. They posited that their approach is more holistic, and thereby conducive and appropriate for educational researchers to consider the issues surrounding minority students' degree of success in the scholastic environment. This perspective offered this researcher a framework that is specific to the population that he sought to interview and the environment in which they have experienced their K-6 education. As disengagement can be a result of marginalization, the factors that lead to scholastic disengagement and its relationship to gang affiliation could be surveyed.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) afforded this researcher the ability to examine the role that Whiteness plays in the educational system. CRT provides the opportunity to hone in on the element of race, adding to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and the multiple marginality framework (Conchas & Vigil, 2012) that were used in the study. Adoption of CRT allowed for an analysis of the influence White public school teachers have on pre-kindergarten through sixth grade students who were raised in neighborhoods and social ecological systems that are very different from their own, as well as the students' families with whom they interact. There are five central tenets of CRT: (a) challenge dominant ideology, (b) centrality of race and racism and the relationship to other forms of subordination, (c) commitment to social justice, (d) centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) an interdisciplinary perspective (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Counter storytelling is a valuable method in the realm of CRT (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002.) Through the observation of student and teacher interactions

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within the classroom, as well as the accounts produced by Latino males, identified as gang members by the criminal justice system, racism can be understood by those who understand it best: the victims. A primary tenet of CRT is the recognition of experiential knowledge as an authentic means to allow the voice of the oppressed to be heard.

Cultural proficiency among school administrators and classroom educators should be considered as it relates to CRT. As the elements of the race of educators and the race of their students is probed, it was necessary to assess the of cultural awareness of the educational institutions being researched in this study. Terrell and Lindsey (2009) devised a continuum to help educational leaders explore their personal level of proficiency as well as their organizations' degree of cultural proficiency. The continuum, which includes six stages, was designed to initiate reflection and growth:

1. Cultural destructiveness: you or your school seek to deculturize others and devalue their culture.

2. Cultural incapacity: attempting to make the cultures of others appear to be wrong or incongruent with proper values.

3. Cultural blindness: the inability, whether intentional or not, to acknowledge the cultures of others.

4. Cultural pre-competence: a paradigm shift in the school culture that implements current strategies and beliefs that promote equity. The understanding that change needs to occur on a broader scale, but there's still uncertainty as to the best method to achieve growth in positive, inclusive manner.

5. Cultural competence: a framework that is additive to the cultures within your setting and seeks to increase further knowledge in this realm. Ongoing development is strategic and sustainable.

6. Cultural proficiency: social justice drives the commitment amongst staff and site leadership to promote a commitment to authentic cultural proficiency through a constant state of reflection and dialogue (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 25)

Within the context of this study, the educational experiences of Latino males were examined through their personal accounts. As teacher relationships, teacher biases, and teacher dispositions are probed, CRT provided a relevant method to compare and contrast the perceptions of the teachers who serve marginalized youth in the Central Coast County. Through the observations of classroom environments and interviews with their respective teachers, CRT contributed to the clarification of themes that were evaluated and reviewed in this study.

Youth Control Complex

Through a conglomeration of punitive social controls in the lives of marginalized youth, Rios (2011) maintained that a youth control complex exists; through its ability to exert a level of dominance, this complex can criminalize the juveniles through their systematic control mechanisms. Rios explained that the controls are manifested in two distinct forms of criminalization: material and symbolic. The material form of criminalization is postulated to consist of school discipline practices that alienate, law enforcement tactics that are harassing and often based on pretextual probable cause, and community and private ordinances that are aversively racist and exclusionary in nature. The symbolic form of criminalization is exhibited in the routine and daily microaggressions that youth in marginalized communities experience. For instance, Latino youth in Ag Town can be constantly scrutinized at school, on the street, or

in their quest to be employed, as a gang member. In 2009, the new Ag Town Chief of Police

initiated a concerted effort to combat organized gangs, which are composed mostly of young

Latino males[3]. Hirschi (1969) postulated that when bonds with society are broken, such as those

with in the school or family, delinquent acts may take place. These societal relationships can

occur with a juvenile's family, social network, or educational system. As these bonds weaken or

deteriorate, the juvenile may seek association with other alienated peers and become involved in

activity that is deemed criminal or sociologically inappropriate (Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991).

Frequent scrutiny by citizens, educators, business owners, and police officers become the norm

and creates barriers for marginalized youth that adolescents in more affluent communities never

experience. Through the vantage point of the youth control complex framework, street

socialized youth and their educational experience can be understood more aptly. Barriers and

obstacles of which educators and other members of society may not be aware can be integrated

into this study. The role that educators may unknowingly be complicit in perpetuating can be

reviewed. Discipline practices and policies within school systems can be scrutinized. Within the

juvenile justice system and the rehabilitative role that it is designed to play, this framework

offers the possibility of exposing the potentially incongruent theory of utilizing punitive social

control tactics in lieu of supportive, restorative practices.

Tolerance Theory

The central theme behind tolerance theory is based on the premise that within the

learning environment, teachers may not be able to meet the needs of all of the students due to

their limitations in developing appropriate behavioral and instructional strategy for some

students' specific needs. This limitation is considered the teachers' tolerance. This capacity

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[3] The source for this material would reveal the identity of the participating institution. Therefore, it has been omitted intentionally to protect the subjects' confidentiality.

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limitation, or tolerance, is affected by factors such as increased capacity due to specific skill

development or decreased capacity when certain variables within the teacher's span of access are

unavailable (Gerber, 1988). Likewise, as a result of a teacher's individual limitations based on

efficacy, experience, or confidence, some student's needs are potentially not met (Cook,

Semmel, & Gerber, 1999). Tolerance theory maintains that if a student's needs are beyond the

scope of the teacher's pedagogical tolerance, the students' needs will not be addressed or

fulfilled. When some students bring their adverse life experiences and unique disposition with

them into the classroom environment, the teacher may be unable to respond in a manner that will

address these behaviors appropriately. Consequently, students can be labeled, disciplined, and

alienated due to no fault of their own. In the elementary grades, effective interventions, behavior

assessments, and engagement through teacher relationships are critical. It is equally critical to

identify a strategy to enable a teacher to recognize this dilemma and respond appropriately.

Tolerance theory will help to explain and put into perspective, the amalgam of culture, values,

and socialization that occurs when students enters a classroom environment that is managed by

an educator who has a potentially incompatible disposition.

How the Components of the Conceptual Framework Fit Together

To adequately evaluate the role of the school as an institutional component that bears a

critical responsibility for recognizing its part in stifling a student's trajectory in the STPP, the

pre-kindergarten through sixth grade educational experience requires analysis through multiple

theoretical perspectives. School policies, hiring practices, and behavior management strategies

used by teachers have the potential effect of alienating minority children who reside in

marginalized communities. Separate from the institutional component of the educational system

are the bioecological systems that encompass the student and create a bidirectional influence on

both student and teacher. As the student traverses through the elementary grade levels, these external and internal forces begin to dictate and mold the student's connection to the school. If circumstances begin to cause self-doubt, alienation, or perceived academic failure, the student can become at risk for delinquent behavior.

Currently, zero tolerance philosophies and school-imposed disciplinary measures have become controversial and heavily debated topics. Regardless, removal from the school setting only increases the potential for a student to begin affiliation with peers facing the same dilemma of alienation. The culmination of these various conditions can increase a youth's chance of becoming involved with the juvenile criminal justice system, thereby setting into motion a punitive social control construct. Studying the effect of the interaction which can occur when diverse cultures commingle between an elementary student and their teacher in the classroom community will require the use of diverse epistemologies. Innumerable events, some of which are subtle and occur without malice or ill intent, have the propensity to catalyze a student's path to alienation and eventual juvenile justice involvement. In order to assess the variables that factor into a student's potential path to incarceration, educational, sociological, criminological, and sociological frameworks and theories must be considered. When incorporated together, these philosophies can develop a framework that can help practitioners understand the dynamics that occur as a result of the relationship between a teacher and students who come from dissimilar backgrounds. Human interactions, especially those that occur between adult and child, can affect the dynamic of a classroom by virtue of both the teacher and students' culture, values, and unique personality. School policy, practice, and value systems will influence students' scholastic experiences. Similarly, the teacher brings unique characteristics and cultural influences that can potentially enhance or hinder the classroom community. Since minority youth

from marginalized communities have a lesser probability of being placed in a classroom environment with their teachers' inherent disposition and perspective that is congruent with theirs, they run the risk of placement within a classroom community that can cause alienation and emotional deflation.

Critical theory provides for the overarching analysis of the frameworks that can address the dynamics that occur in the classroom community. The school itself is an institution and within that institution lies a large community. The community is composed of many teachers, support personnel, parents, students, and others. Each educational community has its own norms, values, and cultures, which can have a profound effect on students' development and attachment with the school. Unfortunately, the educational intuition has been largely influenced by the culture of the White, middle class majority, creating a discord between student cultures and the educational institutions established norms and practices.

CRT afforded the researcher the opportunity to closely examine the role Whiteness plays in educational institution, as it can wield significant influence in shaping a student's reasoning and add to their bias. CRT was used in this study to examine cultural proficiency, not only in the educational system, but also within the network of various social control frameworks, including the punitive social control component. Tolerance theory considers the related elements of bonding or one's perceived limit in the area of acceptance of certain behaviors. These theories must be viewed and analyzed, not only through the lens of critical theory, CRT, culturally relevant pedagogy, and behavior management theory, but also through the lens of theories that address the ecology of a student's life course, such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological systems theory, the multiple marginality framework, and the youth control complex.

Historical Background of Criminal Gangs

The historical component of gangs in the United States, along with the specific history of youth gangs in California, need to be addressed to provide an understanding of the how the gang culture has developed and provide its context within this study. Although a significant amount of research has been conducted on urban adolescent gangs, as well as at-risk youth in urban school settings, there is a dearth of research addressing gangs in quasi-rural, less populated regions of the United States. Specifically, little research has been conducted on how the experience of growing up in a marginalized community coupled with the influence of gangs can potentially shape an individual's scholastic experience. It is essential that the link between marginalized, low-income neighborhoods and juvenile gang affiliation be examined as a sociological and bioecological element that has the propensity to affect one's educational path. As the history of gangs is addressed, the myriad events, legislation, and political climate will be chronicled at the state and local level to provide an understanding of the depth and complexity of street gangs in Central Coast County. The manner in which law enforcement, local governmental agencies, and the community responded to the record breaking teen homicide rate in Central Coast County will be conveyed through an analysis of news reports and government generated documents.

The origin of criminal gang activity in the United States can be traced back to the period following the American Revolution. During this time period, gangs were made up of individuals who had emigrated from Germany, Ireland, and England. This first wave of gang activity occurred between the late 1700s and 1850. As the United States grew and became more culturally diverse, other gangs began to form and were typically based on one's ethnicity and neighborhood of origin. Much like today, the members were often poor, and sought a means to a

better life, because they did not possess the skills or resources to improve their condition. Gang activity increased as new immigrants from China, Poland, Italy, and Austria began to arrive in the United States. Slum conditions grew, thereby setting the stage for more opportunities to become gang involved. As the migration of Americans began westward, gang activity began to materialize in cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles. The first concerted law enforcement effort to thwart gang activity began in 1915. The era of prohibition, followed by the Great Depression in 1929, only fueled opportunities for criminal activity to flourish (Howell & Moore, 2010).

Frederic Thrasher undertook a significant study of urban street gangs in 1927, researching 1,313 purported gang members in the city of Chicago. This study is still referenced today as a relevant and noteworthy research project to understand the reasons why street gangs form and their influence on marginalized communities. Thrasher's (1927) study highlights the reason young males decide to affiliate with gangs and the societal influences that affect their decision to embark on this lifestyle. Thrasher maintained that gangs come from poor neighborhoods and facilitate delinquency. He theorized that the juveniles joined the gangs due to a lack of opportunities, coupled with their lack of drive and inability to offer employable skills.

Gangs in California first emerged the 1890s and were described as groups of men of Mexican descent. According to Moore and Pinderhughes (1993), the first Mexican American gangs likely formed in Los Angeles in the 1920s., Two significant events in California during the 1920s provoked the increase in Mexican-American gangs: the Sleepy Lagoon Murder and the Zoot Suit Riots. As Mexican immigration increased in California, along with the migration of African American families to Southern California, the presence of gangs became more evident

and the numbers of street gangs increased. Between the 1920's and 1950's gang activity began to spread to other regions of California, primarily in low income, marginalized communities. During the 1980s, the crack cocaine epidemic surged in predominantly low-income regions of California, where violence increased, especially in the African American communities (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Inciardi, 1990).

The emergence of Chicano youth street gangs in California can be traced to the East Los Angeles, beginning in the 1940s. The Mexican immigrants that were marginalized in communities throughout California, most of whom were affected by the adverse circumstances their parents faced, began to form youth gangs (Conchas & Vigil, 2012). In Central Coast County, the agriculture industry has been a significant part of the County's economy since the early 1920s. Many Mexican immigrants came to Central Coast County because of the need for inexpensive laborers willing to take on the unpleasant task of picking and cutting lettuce. The ebb and flow of the workers resulted in some remaining to raise their families and pursue the American dream. Over time, the valley region of Central Coast County became home to many young men who traced their roots to Mexico. As parents struggled to provide for their families by working long days, children in this region became exposed to the same conditions that create an environment vulnerable to gang activity. As some of the young men from Central Coast County were sentenced to the California Correctional System upon being convicted of a crime, many furthered their allegiance to a much larger and more structured Mexican prison gang. Having developed over the past several decades in this geographical area, these conditions set the stage for the record breaking violence that the county has experienced between the time period between 2005-2015.

Prison gangs and street gangs are considered to be separate in nature (Morales, 2013); however, many street gang members become incarcerated and will affiliate with specific prison gangs affiliated based on race, as is done in prison. The majority of prison gangs are based on race, because the prison populations are extremely race conscious. The two major Mexican gangs in the California prison system have been rivals since 1968, when a faction of the Mexican Mafia broke away and formed what is now known as *Nuestra Familia*. This division is currently in effect within the prison system and on the streets. When individuals are released from prison, they often reconnect with their street gang, which has allegiance to the prison gang. Prison gangs often give direction and maintain control of specific street gangs. Those who affiliate as Northerners or Norteños on the street are aligned with Nuestra Familia in prison. Like their rivals, the Southerners or Sureños, align with the Mexican Mafia. Consequently, there is more influence from the prison gangs on the street gangs, thereby creating a scenario that perpetuates the violence that spreads to the streets (Morales, 2013).

Under Penal code sections 186.22 (f), the California Penal Code defines a criminal street gang as:

> any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts enumerated in paragraphs (1) to (25), inclusive, or (31) to (33), inclusive, of subdivision (e), having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.

In Central Coast County, the Norteños have been the primary street gang for the past 60 years, and for the majority of that time confined their criminal activity to Ag Town and the

surrounding cities within the Ag Valley (Mendoza, 2012; Morales, 2013). However, over time, Mexican families from Mexico and Southern California began to settle in Central Coast County, largely due to the work surrounding the thriving agricultural industry. Many of the young men who emigrated from these areas became victimized by the Norteño street gangs. For protection and the ensuing draw to the gang life, they affiliated the with Sureño street gang. Until the late 1980s, Norteño street gangs in Ag Town and the surrounding areas would often attack each other and bore their allegiance to their specific neighborhood; however, in the latter part of 1998, there was a call by Nuestra Familia to unite all Northerners and cease the infighting (Reynolds, 2014). This united front only increased the strength of the Norteños, which in turn allowed their efforts to be focused on criminal activity and initiate attacks on their Sureño rivals. During this time, federal, state, and local law enforcement began conducting in depth, sophisticated investigations into Nuestra Familia's criminal activity within California. According to some experts and gang leaders, the ensuing arrests that fragmented Nuestra Familia's leadership were a key element in the ensuing street violence among juveniles from the two rival gangs. Law enforcements rationale was that by isolating gang leaders in the isolation facilities and transferring other leaders to federal prisons out of state, the once tightly controlled gang would fall into a state of disarray. According to a 2010 report by the California Department of Justice and the Bureau of Investigation and Intelligence report on organized street crime in California, Ag Town was one of the towns most affected by violence because it had a record 29 homicides.

Legislative Initiatives to Reduce Gang Violence

As violence increased in the United States, especially among adolescent males, the War on Crime and the War on Drugs came to the forefront. Zero tolerance campaigns began levying stiffer sentences for those identified as gang members and juveniles. The manner in which

individuals, including juveniles, could be labeled and identified a gang member became relatively effortless after the advent of the CalGang database. The database, a state funded system that stores information on criminal street gangs and their alleged associates, is operated pursuant to United States Code of Federal Regulations as part of a criminal intelligence system. This labeling was unchecked and could not be disputed by those identified therein.

The conservative approach to the war on gangs created dire consequences for thousands of young Latino and African American males due to Proposition 21 and the addition of gang enhancements to sentencing. Under this new statute, juveniles could receive adult sentences, including life without parole. The Street Terrorism Act, the Three Strikes Law, and the Gang Violence and Juvenile Crime Prevention Act, also known as Proposition 21 were initiatives in California that were designed to reduce crime and make the streets safer. Proposition 21 was passed by California voters on March 7, 2000. Under this statute, a 14 year old could be charged as an adult for specific violent crimes, and juveniles 16 years or older could be tried as adults for any felony if they were found to be unfit for juvenile court (California Legislative Analyst's Office, n.d.). According to Taylor (2001) Proposition 21 was extremely contentious because it was incongruent with various social programs and policies designed to treat and rehabilitate juveniles. Taylor asserted that the new statute would hinder rehabilitation and lodge juveniles with adult prisoners, only decreasing their chance of successful assimilation into society upon release.

Prior to the passing of Proposition 21 a juvenile could not be incarcerated past the age of 25, and that time would be served in the California Youth Authority. Under current sentencing guidelines, a teenager charged as an adult would be transferred to the California Department of Corrections upon turning 18 and serve the remainder of their sentence within that system. To

exacerbate this dilemma, the vast majority of juveniles did not possess the financial means to secure highly competent private attorneys. Most teens were assigned overworked court appointed attorneys who did have access to skilled, innovative investigative teams who could do the necessary fieldwork required to contact witnesses and evaluate or discover potential inadequacies or errors in the police investigation The prosecution has access to district attorney investigators, the originating departments' investigators, and crime scene analysis resources at their disposal. Oftentimes, teens would be forced to accept a plea bargain so as not to risk a significantly longer sentence if taken to trial; however, the plea bargain would still give the teens lengthy prison sentences and place strikes on their record. The three strikes law places many offenders in the precarious dilemma of facing a potential life sentence if they have any further transgressions, either while in custody or upon their release. As the war on gangs in California continued, the violence on the streets of Ag Town increased.

In the latter part of 1998, there was a call for all Northerners to unite. This mandate, which was delivered from a leader of Nuestra Familia who was incarcerated in Pelican Bay, became a pivotal moment as warring factions of the Norteños within Ag Town became an amalgamated force (Reynolds, 2014). Law enforcement became concerned as they noticed members who were rivals based on territory and neighborhoods were not associating on the streets. This newly declared truce among Northerners became the beginning of the escalation in violence against rival gang members within Ag Town. The law enforcement response became equally united as federal, state, and local agencies began joint investigations to thwart Nuestra Familia's influence and subsequent criminal activity. Although gang activity had decreased nationally between the mid 1990s and 2000, it began to rise in 2001 (National Gang Center, n.d.). Unfortunately, Ag Town was not immune to this increase. Between 2006-2009, the

number of homicides increased from 4 to 29 in Ag Town alone; 91% of these homicides were classified as gang related.[4] In 2004, Senator Barbara Boxer committed $3.1 million in federal funds to begin the Central Coast County Gang Task Force. This influx of federal monies continued as the war on gangs became a local reality for the residents of Central Coast County and Ag Town. In March of 2005, the official gang task force of Central Coast County began their crackdown on crime. However, teen homicide rates only increased as the task force became more aggressive.[5]

As violence increased, the Mayor of Ag Town met with the U.S. Attorney General to discuss the rampant gang violence and escalating homicide rates. By 2008 the number of homicides had risen to 25 (23 of which were gang related) and there were 142 shootings in total. In 2009 there were 151 shootings and 29 homicides. The proposed strategy began when the U.S. Attorney General convened a 2-day Gang Crime Summit in 2009. As a result, the first major law enforcement effort was initiated in 2010. The broad strategy and strong partnerships formed as part of the ongoing anti-violence efforts has received national attention. The Town of Ag was one of six cities in the country to participate in a White House/Department of Justice Initiative known as the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention. Although the media portrayed the law enforcement efforts led by the U.S. Attorney General as successful, the homicides continued. In 2010, the LA Times reported that the killing of a 6 year old boy, the unintended victim in a gang related shooting, outraged the community. This killing was the 31st of the year; the article

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[4] The source for this material would reveal the identity of the participating institution. Therefore, it has been omitted intentionally to protect the subjects' confidentiality.

[5] The source for this material would reveal the identity of the participating institution. Therefore, it has been omitted intentionally to protect the subjects' confidentiality.

cited the reluctance of the large migrant worker population's reluctance to cooperate as a barrier to prosecution.[6]

However, during this same time frame, the Ag Town police department acquired an armored tank through a homeland security grant. This grant program, known as the 1033 program, allowed agencies to acquire military equipment using homeland security monies. The Ag Town painted their armored tank black, along with the acronym SWAT embossed on each side of the vehicle. Officers and the Chief of Police dressed in camouflage tactical clothing and posed with the newly obtained tank for a photo op with the local newspaper. Members of the community highly criticized the vehicle's acquisition, however the Chief of Police reportedly did not understand the public's negative reception. The Chief of Police responded to the criticism by stating, "It [the tank] provides a high capability of protection for our officers and the community."[7]

Over the next 5 years, Ag Town continued to experience significant gang-related homicide rates. Smaller surrounding towns in Central Coast County suffered many losses due to the spillover of the feud between the rival gangs. The formation of a Gang Task Force, increased spending on School Resource Officers, and prosecuting juveniles as adults, appeared to have little effect on the crime rate or teen-on-teen violence. The reliance on punitive social control strategies proved fruitless in a county that desperately needed an intervention model that could address the needs of the juveniles who were turning to the gang life or becoming entangled in the juvenile justice system.

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[6] The source for this material would reveal the identity of the participating institution. Therefore, it has been omitted intentionally to protect the subjects' confidentiality.
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Pathway to Gang Affiliation

Several circumstances can lead juveniles to be introduced to and possibly indoctrinated into a gang. Unfortunately, the time when students begin to show strong signs of scholastic disengagement in school—adolescence—is also the riskiest time for youths to be tempted to join a gang (Howell, 2010; Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015; Rios, 2011). With the multiple variables that can lead to gang affiliation, it is prudent to examine risk factors as well as preventative measures to construct strategies for deflecting a youth's trajectory towards delinquency or gang affiliation. Consequently, gang affiliation increases the potential for numerous negative encounters, with less than optimum outcomes (Hill et al., 1999). To prevent gang involvement and understand the factors that lead to gang affiliation, studies have identified high yield predictors of future gang membership to aid in the development of preventative measures and strategies to combat the issue.

Influential studies into gang membership have relied on data that obtained from five large-scale longitudinal studies: the Denver Youth Study, Rochester Youth Development Study, Seattle Social Development Project, the Pittsburgh Youth Study (Howell & Egley, 2005), and the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. One seminal study utilized data from the Seattle Social Development Project (Hill et al., 1999). In this study, high yield predictors identified youth who were between the ages of 10-12 to predict future gang membership between the ages of 13-18. A second study was conducted by Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015), who analyzed data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Pyrooz and Sweeten analyzed 7,335 responses from self-reported gang members to ascertain the patterns involved in their deciding to affiliate with or join a gang. Their findings indicated that the modal age of joining a gang is 13, suggesting that intervention efforts are crucial prior to the ages of 12 and younger. However,

their findings also supported the notion that gang membership or affiliation can be transitional and temporary during adolescence. As Vigil (1993) maintained, a stage of introduction into the gang occurs for new gang members. During this time of adolescent exploration, the social network and status that the gang provides can add to the allure of the membership. In both studies, a youth's neighborhood environment, family functionality, and school attachment provide insight into the potential risk of joining a gang. Many studies have been conducted linking poor academic achievement to delinquency and gang membership (Howell, 2010). Several studies have examined the relationship to school connectedness, school climate (Hill et al., 1999; Resnick, Ireland, & Borowsky, 2004), and the perceived relationship with one's teacher (Thornberry et al., 2003). According to Howell and Egley (2005) and Sprague and Walker (2000), interventions should be made in early childhood, because behavior and actions become evident during this time and preventive measures should be implemented. Howell and Egley extended Thornberry et al.'s (2003) developmental theory of delinquency, positing that the progression to gang involvement is a pathway that can begin at an earlier age than the theory of delinquency maintains. Because the multitude of influences and circumstances can bidirectionally guide a youth towards gang affiliation, certain human needs can be absent in their environment, causing people to seek the fulfillment of those necessities from an alternative source.

Abraham Maslow (1943) asserted that humans seek to meet five hierarchical needs, with the most basic and necessary being food, shelter, and safety. These motivational needs drive our ability to exist as we strive to move up the hierarchical ladder of the pyramid of human needs. As one need is met, the next need is desired. In this pyramid of five needs, *belonging* ranks as the third tenet. It is widely recognized that social bonding with peers is a natural process in

adolescents' maturation. Poston (2009) interpreted Maslow's theory as it relates to belonging, because adolescents will seek to affiliate with a group if they feel supported and accepted. Society encourages peer interaction and touts it as a healthy maturation process as well an experience that prepares teens for adulthood. Non-profit groups advocate for and sustain afterschool group activities, city and county funded recreation programs provide multiple opportunities for positive enriching activities, school settings offer clubs based on student interests, sports teams are heavily funded and supported by both private and public schools, and social and academic themed groups can be found at virtually any secondary school site. Even law enforcement has bought into the notion that sponsoring athletic teams and leagues can divert youth from criminal behavior. However, despite these efforts, the social benefits of a street gang still becomes the choice of certain youth. Because preadolescents desperately search for acceptance and belonging, the gang lifestyle can fill that much desired void . Teachers can play an important role in promoting a sense of belongingness (Beck & Malley, 1998).

According to a study conducted over 65 years ago in New York City, Dumpson (1949) reported multiple causal factors for delinquency. One key finding was that family neglect, lack of affection, negative stereotyping, and a disenchanting educational experience are significant contributing factors to the feeling of being alienated from mainstream society. To satisfy the need to belong, youth will seek solace from others who have experienced the same alienation. Sánchez-Jankowski (1991) posited that marginalized Latino males who sought gang affiliations do so because of a lack of personal identity that needed to be fulfilled. The sense of worth and increased self-esteem are natural desires of all youth. The choice of the group that provides this affiliation and fills this void can be detrimental to some and positive for others. In a society that promotes structured group activities, there are numerous socially acceptable avenues for

adolescent males to belong; however, according to Conchas and Vigil (2012), the community in which many low-income, barrio youth socialize can create a strong admiration for those who are perceived as tough or aggressive (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Sánchez-Jankowski, 2003). Different communities value particular attributes that can cause teenagers to strive for this recognition. Consequently, the qualities that some youth want to emulate are not always healthy or legal. Sánchez-Jankowski (2003) maintained that a mindset of dominance is essential for survival, supporting the belief that violence is acceptable in order to obtain their needed resources. Due to these insufficient resources, the necessity to use force becomes acceptable and an integral part of the street culture. The ecological system, one that has multiple marginalities, can increase the chance of gang affiliation, eventual incarceration, and decreased academic opportunities (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Rios, 2011; Thornberry et al., 2003). Youth from marginalized communities have greater risk factors within their neighborhoods because parental supervision is inadequate due to the financial pressures parents endure as they struggle to provide for their families. Consequently, this affiliation can lead to initial positive benefits, such as increased street respect, protection, social interaction, and an increase in the sense of self-worth. Unfortunately, the implications can cause increased targeting by law enforcement, arrest, stiffer probation terms, and ostracizing by the educational institution.

The School to Prison Pipeline and Zero Tolerance Mandates

The STPP theory has been linked frequently to the growing number of juveniles who have entered the criminal justice system and begun their potential path to adult incarceration (Wald & Losen, 2003). Many believe that the manner in which their conduct was adjudicated in the educational system has thrust them into the subjectively defined STPP, either directly or indirectly (Skiba et al., 2011). The ACLU has maintained that a school-to-prison pipeline (STPP)

exists within the United States educational system whereby students are forced out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The entry into the STPP is believed to occur as a result of some form of disciplinary consequence that occurs at school, which in turn leads the student to be remanded to the juvenile justice system (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). Once in the juvenile justice system, the potential for continued monitoring and supervision may occur.

Between 1991 and 2019, our educational system has experienced terrible acts of violence, appalling dropout rates, and significant racial inequities. Student safety became a priority and the hyper criminalization of various ethnic groups occurred simultaneously (Rios, 2011). One of the proposed safeguards was the institution of zero tolerance policies in school settings. Initially, this policy was specifically designed to address the possession of a weapon by a student and mandate unequivocal consequences in the form of expulsion; however, this policy began to morph into a much broader interpretation of what was acceptable in many school districts (Devoe et al., 2004). As a result, the use of negative consequences, removal from the classroom, suspension, and expulsion increased significantly, disproportionately pushing out minorities, specifically African American and Latinos (Suh et al., 2007; Wald & Losen, 2003). Teachers often lacked the classroom management skills necessary to handle many of the students they were tasked to instruct, leading to the disproportionate levying of negative disciplinary consequences on minority students (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Suspensions and removal from school became common consequences for students who were accused of the quite subjective offenses of defiance, disrespect, or insubordination. As a result, African American and Latino students were suspended at a much more frequent rate than their White peers (Martinez, 2009; Skiba, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003).

The STPP metaphor has the potential to indicate that the origination point in the trajectory of the path to prison is school. Although when examining the factors that lead to school failure or incarceration, they can be analyzed as two unrelated circumstances, with similar factors contributing to both issues (Pantoja, 2014). Interestingly, factors that lead to dropping out of school (such as disengagement, maladaptive behavior, and alienation) and sociological factors (such as socioeconomic status and marginalization) that affect many minority students also contribute to a student's path to gang affiliation (Finn, 1989). However, in the predominant literature, the STPP theory addresses the disproportionate number of minority students who are disciplined based on exclusionary discipline policies. Undeniably, the racial disparity in our prison population mirrors that of school suspension and expulsion data (Losen, 2011; Skiba et al., 2011). The racial disproportionality of suspensions cannot be denied. In some states, African American students are expelled at a rate six times greater than their White peers and in some states the rate is a high as 10 times that of their White counterparts. To compound the issue, there is no evidence to show that African American students break the rules at a higher rate than any other group (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

Although racial disproportionality is believed to be one of the primary factors in the STPP, numerous factors contribute to becoming involved in the juvenile justice system, both in, and out, of school (Heitzeg, 2009). The zero tolerance philosophy in school has been associated with the STPP, causing significant debate over the effectiveness of the stringent policies and strategies to employ more effective frameworks in our educational system (Wald & Losen, 2003). The concern with discipline practices has caused some districts to reexamine and improve their discipline procedures. Alternative strategies have been proposed and in many cases implemented through the United States, such as research-based intervention systems and

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processes to mitigate and address students' social and emotional needs (Skiba, 2014). Similarly, the crisis involving the number of students who drop out of school has generated a wealth of attention in the field of education (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007; Murdock, 1999; Tobin & Sugai, 1999). The exclusionary disciplinary practices that have been implemented over the past four decades have contributed to the number of underserved students who are pushed out of the educational system (Heitzeg, 2009; Wald & Losen, 2003)

As evidence has pointed to flaws in typical disciplinary strategies, educational leaders have analyzed and questioned the impact and effectiveness of the consequential procedures that have been utilized. Alternative strategies have been proposed and, in many cases, implemented throughout the United States, such as research based intervention systems and processes to mitigate and address students' social and emotional needs (Skiba, 2014). According to Skiba (2014), a preventive model that incorporates schoolwide strategies, social emotional learning, screening for mental health issues, and family and community involvement is more likely to address the issues of safety, order, and appropriate consequences.

Aside from school discipline practices and interrelated school policies that affect students, the degree to which entrance into the juvenile criminal justice system may expedite or enhance the path to prison as an adult has been addressed minimally in the STPP literature. Becoming involuntarily entangled with the juvenile justice system causes a greater propensity for juveniles to have substandard outcomes upon being released. Recidivism, dropping out of school, and unemployment are some of the outcomes (Seigle, Walsh, & Weber, 2014). With over 90,000 youth currently in custody at any given time in the United States (Leone & Meisel, 1997), the effects of incarceration on a juvenile's education, self-esteem, and ability to improve their chances of successfully being discharged from probation are remarkable. Much of the

literature refers to students being pushed into the juvenile justice system, but the specific impact and ramifications have not been addressed with fidelity. Part of the reason may be the vast differences in how juvenile offenses are handled throughout the United States. In California, the majority of offenses committed by adolescents that result in incarceration occur beyond school grounds. Typically, in the State of California, in order to be lodged in a juvenile hall or similar facility, a crime under the penal code or violating probation terms must occur. A typical school-based discipline offense that results in suspension does not generally lend itself to a criminal offense. Those that do—such as selling drugs, possession of a weapon, inflicting serious bodily injury—are often expellable offenses. Nonetheless, the manner in which school discipline is applied and the potential disengaging attitudes displayed toward low-income minority youth may add to the feeling of alienation, which can contribute to seeking solace with peers outside of the school environment. In 2011, a 6-year study was concluded in the State of Texas to determine the relationship between school discipline and juvenile justice involvement. The researchers found that White students were suspended less frequently than their non-White peers. Further, the study found that the likelihood of contact with the juvenile justice increased for minority students (Fabelo et al., 2011). Certainly, schools play a role in the STPP as a result of their inability to recognize strategies that are appropriate for members of non-White cultures (Pantoja, 2014). However, a critical area to examine is the influence that being lodged in juvenile hall has on the likelihood of reincarceration.

Entrance into the juvenile justice system generally leads to being placed on probation with either formal or informal terms. Violation of the terms can result in the student being returned to juvenile hall. The punitive social control framework that permeates juvenile justice practices in California are consistent with the youth control complex (Rios, 2011). While in

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juvenile hall, students attend schools that are run by the county; however, the classes they take are typically core classes, and may be classes that the students have already taken and passed at their original school. These credits become essentially wasted and are considered elective credits (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2009). Once on probation, the student's probation officer can influence or dictate school placement, which can be a county-run Community Day School, or other Court School. These schools are often connected in some fashion to the probation department, furthering the law enforcement framework that is applied to the student's education. Community Day Schools and Court Schools often lack the rigor that a comprehensive school possesses (Heitzeg, 2009). In addition, credits earned in county-run schools do not transfer easily back into the traditional school system (Feierman et al., 2009). Likewise, as students are placed into juvenile detention, their home school does not allow them to catch up or make up the work, creating a scenario where the entire semester becomes a waste of effort, causing the student to fall further behind. Placement in juvenile hall can significantly affect a student's ability to graduate, pushing the student further away from the educational environment (Feierman et al., 2009; Wald & Losen, 2003).

Factors that naturally place a student in a higher risk category increase the propensity for police contact. The age when juveniles are at greatest risk for gang affiliation, 12-15 (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015), is the same age at which clear signs of disengagement and predictors of dropping out of school can be observed (O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2011) Eccles and Midgley (1989) and Eccles et al. (1993) maintained that scholastic motivation and the positive perception of school diminish significantly in middle school. Detachment from school in the middle years can be more problematic for students who reside in lower socioeconomic status environments. In a longitudinal analysis spanning 8 years and following 13,000 high poverty,

urban students from Philadelphia Balfanz et al. (2007) concluded that strong disengagement and dropout predictors can be recognized in middle school. These researchers concluded that 60% of the students would ultimately fail to graduate based on the following high yield predictors: poor attendance, receiving a poor final behavior grade, or failing math or English in sixth grade. The reasons for disengagement are complex and can involve a multitude of factors; however, a constant within this broad area of student disengagement is the presence of a teacher within the student's life. The predictors of disengagement and potential school detachment can become easier to identify once students have reached middle school (Eccles & Midgley, 1989), at which time it is believed that the chance of reengagement diminishes (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Therefore, it would be worthwhile to investigate the elementary school experience and the influence a teacher has on a student's level of connectedness to the school (Murdock, 1999).

School Disengagement, Dropout, and Delinquency

Becoming disconnected from the school environment can have long-term negative effects on a student (Cramer et al., 2014). The dropout phenomenon and the decision to leave school must be examined through the student's life course. Signs of school detachment and the relationship to delinquency and eventual dropout have proven to become evident in the elementary grade levels (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Wehlage & Rutter, 1985). High yield predicters that have been identified consistently are lack of attendance, poor behavior, and low socioeconomic status (Dembo et al., 2007). These factors begin to place the students in either formal or informal groups within the educational setting that can create an accumulative disengaging effect. However, it is important to reiterate that indicators of school disengagement can be detected as early as the beginning of first grade, and according to Wehlage and Rutter (1985), it is the behaviors that are most apparent, not attitudes, that become evident later in the

scholastic life course. Despite hurdles that lacking a diploma can pose, the social and emotional effect of being alienated from an institution that is designed to nurture, protect, and educate, can be consequential. Leaving school without obtaining a diploma constitutes an obvious and intentional form of detachment. Unfortunately, 68% of incarcerated inmates in the United States are high school dropouts (Thornburgh, 2006).

Dropping out of school is a process that occurs over time and is the culmination of many events and circumstances that can lead to a student's eventual withdrawal from school (Alexander et al., 2001). Departure from the school system occurs over 5,000 times a day in the United States and approximately 50,000 times a year in the State of California. In 2015, Hispanic students in California accounted for 34% of all dropouts, representing the largest ethnic group to depart from school without a diploma. White students accounted for approximately 7% of dropouts in California within this same year (California Department of Education, n.d.). These dismal statistics have caused school districts to place a significant amount of attention on recognizing the early indicators of what may lead a student to drop out of school (Finn, 1989; Henry, Knight, & Thornberry 2012). In some instances, the decision is based on students' life circumstances, such as working to support their family, childbirth, etc. However, in many instances, the withdrawal is the final event in a series of many that have accumulated over the life course of the individual's educational trajectory, which in most cases, begins in elementary school (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Finn, 1989). In the analysis of the Rochester Youth Development Study, Henry et al. (2012) concluded that early disengagement is a strong predictor of a student eventually dropping out of school. Spivack and Cianci (1987) conducted a study that followed 611 inner city school children. In this study, the researchers found a relationship between behavior ratings in kindergarten through third grade and later incidents of police contact

by age 18. The aggregate effect of multiple instances of failure, frustration, and less than successful academic assessments can take a toll, and the mounting alienation may come in several forms. A significant longitudinal study, the Beginning School Study, which began in 1982 and followed a cohort of 661 Baltimore students from first grade through high school graduation, revealed many circumstances that shed light on the details of students' educational experience. Regardless, the impact culminates in the student seeking affirmation in some other venue and detaching from the school either mentally or physically (Finn, 1989; Finn & Cox, 1992).

Finn (1989) compared two social emotional perspectives that seek to explain how many events in a student's scholastic experience can shape their attitude, interest, and self-efficacy. One commonly cited framework to is Bernstein and Rulo's (1976) frustration-self esteem model, which asserts that a student's disruptive behavior is often a consequence of an unidentified learning ability. The authors maintained that the behavior eventually becomes extremely problematic, leading to exclusion from the school environment and eventual delinquency. Adding to this perspective, a teacher's low level of tolerance can expedite a student's removal from the classroom because this management strategy often becomes the educator's choice method of handling a disruption (Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

Schools should learn to recognize the signs of potential disregard for school and address them early (Finn, 1989). A model for doing so that Finn (1989) endorses is a *participation-identification model*, which suggests that the vast majority of students gladly partake in their educational endeavors in the early grades, and that engagement, or deterioration thereof, can be a predictor of alienation and behavioral difficulties. Although some students may begin school with a predetermined dislike for the school environment, some teachers may be able to address

this issue successfully and reframe the student's perception of school. However, in some instances, this does not occur, and the cumulative effects of resistance and unsuccessful experiences, disruption, or increased non-participation may increase. These behaviors tend to lead to further academic failures, culminating in a student's complete withdrawal from school in the form of dropping out (Finn & Cox, 1992). In order to adopt an appropriate response to the risk of detachment or disengagement, it is vital that the warning signs of dropping out are recognized as early as possible. In order to address the various factors that lead to overt or passive withdrawal from the school environment, it is necessary to explore strategies that can increase sustainable school connectedness for students beginning in elementary school. Initiating and maintaining school connectedness through the individual teacher may address a variety of troubling issues, such as juvenile delinquency, gang affiliation, criminal justice involvement, and the inability to complete high school. Early disinterest in school and potential disengagement require early detection, coupled with appropriate intervention (Dembo et al., 2007).

During the course of a child's schooling, their level of disengagement can become more evident and apparent. Early indicators of disinterest or non-participation become early predictors of future engagement levels; this disinterest can become evident in the beginning of elementary school (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Finn, 1989; Finn & Cox, 1992). A growing body of research suggests that early disinterest is indicative of future disengagement, increasing the chances of dropping out of high school.

The literature also supports the notion that low levels of engagement become more evident during the transition to middle school. Balfanz et al. (2007) suggested that middle school may be the last chance to redirect the path of a failing student who is at risk for leaving school

prior to fulfilling graduation requirements. Not surprisingly, students report increased alienation in the educational environment once in middle school. Several factors may influence this belief, such as the transition to adolescence, leaving an environment where they had a single teacher throughout the day, and higher academic and behavioral expectations at the middle school level.

The onset of adolescence becomes a crucial time as students face decisions about who they are and who they will become (Eccles et al., 1993) However, factors that may lead to increased disconnection in middle school, such as low grades and substandard achievement, may be linked to the student's negative relationships with teachers in elementary school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). The bifurcation that occurs in the middle school transition occurs at the time when juveniles are most likely to seek affiliation with a gang (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015); this is also the same age at which clear signs of disengagement and predictors of dropping out of school can be observed (O'Connor et al., 2011). Factors that naturally place a student in a higher risk category increase their propensity for police contact. Eccles and Midgley (1989) and Eccles et al. (1993) maintained that scholastic motivation and the positive perception of school diminish significantly in middle school. Detachment from school in the middle years can be more problematic for students who reside in lower socioeconomic status environments. In a longitudinal analysis spanning 8 years and following 13,000 high-poverty urban students from Philadelphia, Balfanz et al. (2007) concluded that strong disengagement and dropout predictors can be recognized in middle school. These researchers concluded that 60% of the students would ultimately fail to graduate based on the following high yield predictors: poor attendance, receiving a poor final behavior grade, or failing math or English in sixth grade. The reasons for disengagement are complex and can involve a multitude of factors; however, a constant within this broad area of student disengagement is the presence of a teacher in the student's life. The

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predictors of disengagement and potential school detachment can become easier to identify once students have reached middle school (Eccles & Midgley, 1989), at which time it is believed that the chance of reengagement diminishes (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). It is therefore important to examine the elementary school experience and a teacher's influence on a student's level of connectedness to the school (Murdock, 1999). The necessity of a strong social emotional foundation and sense of connectedness with the school environment becomes increasingly essential at this juncture in the student's life. Students who display early behaviors that are deemed potential precursors require effective, early intervention (Dembo et al., 2007).

Teacher Relationships

The power of the positive student-teacher relationship is immense (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). A strong teacher-student relationship becomes a critical factor that increases engagement as the student progresses through their educational life course (Ainsworth, 1979; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Feil et al., 2009; Kennedy, 2011). This interpersonal connection can become the tether that binds the student with the school environment. The relationship component confers tremendous preventive strength on the student. A wealth of literature supports the importance of the relationship a student has with their teacher (Baker, 1999; Furrer & Skinner, 1993, Noddings, 2002; Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel, 1997). The connection between the student-teacher relationship and student engagement is noteworthy based on the numerous reasons cited for student withdrawal and detachment. Interestingly, a primary reason cited by surveyed dropouts for leaving school is that they did not feel they had a meaningful relationship with one or more teachers (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Fine, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

The research is abundant in the area of how the teacher-student relationship manifests and its effect on students' trajectory as they navigate their childhood and educational path (Baker, 1999; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007; Pianta et al., 2005; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel, 1997). The importance of developing a relationship appears to be a logical opinion; however, the manner in which an efficacious relationship efficaciously can be difficult to define. Strategies to connect with students may differ substantially based on many variables. Developing an understanding for the student one teaches and the most effective manner in which to connect with the student becomes crucial. Many public schools' value systems are reflective of White middle class culture (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007), and behavioral expectations are implemented through this template. However, students with culturally diverse backgrounds who reside in marginalized communities often have incongruent perceptions of acceptable behavior (Klingner et al., 2005). There is a plethora of research on culturally relevant pedagogy to increase academic engagement within our diverse educational environment. Nevertheless, efforts to understand students, where they live, their values, and the manner in which they are being socialized is lacking.

The belief in developing strong relationships seemingly depends on the teacher being able to cultivate this important bond. A body of research posits the idea that a student's level of interest or ability to engage can influence the relationships either positively or negatively. Interestingly, the child's disposition, which is beyond their control at a young age, can potentially create a wedge in the student teacher relationship. Unfortunately, if the student perceives that the teacher is less than caring, the student's engagement and communication skills are negatively affected (Baker, 1999; Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). An aggravating aspect of the complexity of the student-teacher relationship is that students who

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exhibit externalizing negative behaviors and arguably need the strongest relationships tend to alienate the teacher through their behavior (Murray & Zvoch, 2011). To compound matters, teachers who lack the requisite classroom management skills have a tendency to address off task behavior by utilizing punitive classroom management tactics, as opposed to instructional strategies (Lane, Wehby, & Cooley, 2006). Teachers will display a more positive disposition when a student has higher behavioral engagement. Conversely, students with lower behavioral engagement may be treated in a negative manner, creating a behavioral downward spiral. Students who are inherently engaged at a higher level are treated better and those who are not engaged. Consequently, the disengaged student may continue to be treated less approvingly (Baker, 1999; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The affirmation that a more engaged and cheerful student receives only enhances their esteem (Baker, 1999; Furrer & Skinner, 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The teacher's involvement with the student has a significant impact on a student's perception of the teacher. When a teacher believes he/she has a mode of positive communication with the student, it improves the student's ability to self-regulate their learning (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wentzel, 1997). The engaged student who possesses a higher level of socially acceptable characteristics continues to reap the teacher's praises, thereby increasing their position of engagement and status inside the classroom. Within this structure, the student who is less affable or exhibits difficulty communicating in a manner that is considered acceptable to the teacher is only pushed out of the inner circle that the teacher is creating subconsciously (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Studies have shown that antisocial and aggressive behavior can be related to poor student-teacher relationships (Pianta et al., 2005).

Characteristics that are out of the control of the student, such as their gender (Ewing & Taylor, 2009), economic status (Pianta et al., 2005; Rudasill, 2011) and learning differences have been found to affect the quality of their relationship with the teacher. Studies have shown that students who emanated from low-income households and received special services, had tenuous teacher relationships in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades (Rudasill, Reio, Stipanovic, & Taylor, 2010; Pianta et al., 2005). According to Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007), students must have an emotional connection with their teachers in order to learn. A growing number of students entering school have experienced some form of trauma that renders them less able to assimilate into the school environment. Teachers who have a better understanding of how trauma can affect their students will be more likely to connect and empathize with their children. Kennedy (2011) postulated that students who have failed or experienced trauma previously will perform better in environments where they have a trusting relationship with the teacher. Comparatively, students whose families had higher income levels and received no special services were likely to have close relationships with their teachers. It was also found that a mutually strong teacher-student relationship could mitigate any negative factors (Rudasill et al., 2010). Invariably, as students transition through the grades, their experiences with their teachers will shape their connection with the educational environment, growing or diminishing it (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Although students' sense of connection and opinion of their relationships with their teacher can change, trust has been shown to be mediating factor in students' engagement with and approval of their educational environment (Kennedy, 2011). The importance of positive and supportive relationships with teachers is a critical component of forging authentic connections with students. If intentionally developed, these delicate relationships will result in students' perception of trust and safety (Ainsworth, 1979; Feil et al., 2009; Kennedy, 2011).

Cultural Competence

Inevitably, along a student's educational path, he/she will encounter teachers with differing cultural backgrounds, personalities, value systems, and dispositions (Coopersmith, 2009). As the student population becomes increasingly diverse, the pool of teachers has not evolved similarly; instead, it is composed predominantly of White female teachers from middle-class backgrounds (Major & Brock, 2003). Within the United States, public schools typically reflect White middle class values (Patterson et al., 2007). Students' behavior is interpreted through this paradigm, often times causing White middle class values to be the guiding light within the classroom community of a predominantly Latino and African American student body (Klingner et al., 2005). In California alone, 70% of public school teachers are White (Education Data Partnership, n.d.). Based on this phenomenon, the majority of students from marginalized communities will not be matched with a teacher who possesses similar experiences and cultural attributes. Once students enters the classroom, they bring their unique blend of culture, values, and personality, which are being shaped as they age and progress through school. A student whose background mimics their teacher's background may be able to relate better to the teacher and share similar views of the quality of their relationship (Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Warikoo, 2004). Understanding the student's cultural experiences and their socialization is crucial for educators. Since it is predicted that the teaching population will continue to remain homogenous and the student population will become increasingly diverse, teacher preparation programs and in-service training should include consider increasing teachers' capacity to develop intercultural understanding (Warikoo, 2004). Connections beyond the classroom become vital when building relationships and increasing engagement. Since the family is an integral part of many minority

students lives, developing strong lines of communication and encouraging participation is also essential.

Lareau and Shumar (1996) assert that low-income and minority families can perceive the traditional school environment as intimidating, deterring them from becoming engaged with the school. As a result, theses marginalized groups can be perceived as disinterested. Families who successfully traverse the typical public school environment are those who possess proficiency in the English language, are financially stable, and have access to current technology. Conversely, families who are not as fortunate are less likely to have children who are successful in public school. Ferrara (2015) and Nieto, Rivera, Quiñones, and Irizarry (2013) claimed that when teachers and administrators lack cultural awareness and are not prepared to with for the Latino population, it negatively influences their ability to create successful educational experiences for their students. To combat this deficiency, culturally proficient school sites must devise a comprehensive strategy to support the family unit when they begin their efforts to maintain cultural proficiency. To aid in their efforts to involve minority parents and students, teachers and administrators require training that is sustainable and continuous (Gallagher, 1994; Williams & Chavkin, 1989). Williams and Chavkin (1989) maintained that in order for cultural awareness training and professional development to be viable and effective, the school administration must support the endeavor.

According to Ferrara (2015), families that can develop social capital and improve social relationships are better equipped to learn about the various educational opportunities that may be beneficial to their child. Developing strategies that can engage families who may not understand the means necessary to aid their children can be beneficial to the school as well as the family. The negative connotation that may be associated with low-income migratory families can hinder

the student's ability to become fully engaged in school (Nieto et al., 2013). Educators who are supportive of parent involvement in the educational process can increase involvement for these marginalized groups and improve students' access to additional resources and information necessary for their success (Henderson, 1986). According to Terrell and Lindsey (2009), teachers and students tend to treat each other differently because they have different life experiences. Capacity building in cultural proficiency would offer a significant step in the right direction, empowering low-income and minority families to become advocates at the school site. In order to address the various factors that lead to overt or passive withdrawal from the school environment, it is necessary to explore strategies that can increase sustainable school connectedness for students beginning in elementary school. Initiating and maintaining school connectedness through the individual teacher may address a variety of troubling issues, such as juvenile delinquency, gang affiliation, criminal justice involvement, and the inability to complete high school. Providing education and resources to increase cultural awareness, adopt culturally proficient classroom management strategies, and create a school wide philosophy of inclusion for all students, is crucial in developing an environment that can embrace diversity.

Teacher Disposition

Within the field of student success, key areas of research have focused on improving teacher efficacy (Ames & Ames, 1984), teacher-student relationships (Bandura, 1986; Eccles et al., 1993; Weiner, 1985), and the impact of quality early childhood education (Pianta et al., 2005) and teacher disposition (Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2007). The disposition of an educator who is new to the profession is extremely impactful, because educators exert significant influence on their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Johnson & Reiman, 2007; Shook, 2011). Teacher disposition is connected to student learning and their effectiveness as educators

(Mueller & Hindin, 2011). According to Thornton (2006), teachers must have the right disposition to properly engage their students. In the quest for competent, skilled teachers who can effectively deliver culturally relevant pedagogy, school districts often focus on hiring candidates who display a skill set that is perceived to be able achieve the desired academic results. Districts often base their hiring decisions on whether or not the candidate will appear to be able to properly engage and prepare their students so that they will be able to master the appropriate grade level standards. Knowing what skills teachers need to be effective and how to teach and assess those characteristics are entirely two different domains. When the focus is on teacher disposition, school culture has the potential to improve (Mueller & Hindin, 2011).

Educators often enter the field of education with the desire to help children obtain a quality education and impart knowledge that they feel is necessary for a successful life. When seeking employment, teachers typically lean toward particular subject areas and grade levels for which they feel best suited and in which they feel interested, yet not all teachers are familiar with strategies to engage with and relate to children effectively (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Their course requirements leading up to their credential may have already dictated this path to teaching, because they have chosen specific courses or credentialing pathways in order to teach within subject matter and grade levels.

As the nation's teaching pool continues to produce a homogenous group, our student population continues to diversify (Coopersmith, 2009). The vast majority of those applying to become teachers are white females who originated from suburban middle class neighborhoods. Likewise, this demographic of potential teachers prefers to teach students whose ethnicity and background are similar to theirs (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). It can be challenging to alter teacher beliefs surrounding diversity, expected behavior, and what constitutes an inclusive

learning environment (Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995), especially since a teacher's

expectations of their students may be influenced by the values that were displayed by the

teacher's parents (Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek. 2003). Teacher bias can occur due to a lack of

understanding of their students' backgrounds, along with their ability to be reflexive about their

own potential beliefs that may cause bias and aversive racism (Cline & Necochea, 2006; McCall

1995: Osher et al., 2012). Research supports the perception that racial bias has been a factor in

determining a teacher's decision to address minority students' classroom behaviors (Skiba &

Peterson, 2000). Teacher bias can occur without malice and be due to the many factors that

influence a person's perceptions. However, it is necessary to educate and develop greater

awareness among the predominantly White, middle class teaching ranks, increasing their cultural

competence and helping them be able to apply culturally relevant classroom management

strategies (Hambacher, 2018).

In under-resourced districts that predominantly serve low-income, Hispanic students, it is

imperative that teachers are passionate about teaching, yet also possess the capacity to be

understanding, flexible, and empathic. Without these qualities, teachers will not be able to

deliver engaging learning opportunities (Cline & Necochea, 2006). Especially in challenging,

under-resourced schools, is the teachers' own social-emotional capacity is a critical component

of successful teaching. A significant number of teachers who are new to the profession are

simply ill-equipped to teach the students who exhibit the most need (Darling-Hammond &

Baratz-Snowden, 2007). The teacher's level of social and emotional behavior can either enhance

or contaminate the classroom environment. When educators are able to create a sense of caring

within the classroom community, students' prosocial skills enhanced and utilized within the

classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011). An educator's inability

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to understand the social emotional needs of their students can have long-term detrimental effects. Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2003) suggested that students exhibit lower levels of on-task behavior when the teacher lacks the necessary tools to manage daily infractions. Understanding students' marginalized environments is crucial to teachers fostering student connectedness and trust. The ability to create a warm relationship translates into an effective classroom management style (Baker, Clark, Crowl, & Carlson, 2009). Without this level of understanding and capacity to provide emotional safety, engagement, and connectedness, the response to misbehavior becomes punitive, rather than rehabilitative (Osher et al., 2012; Shook, 2012).

Classroom Management Strategies

Teachers regularly mention disengagement, disruption, and non-compliance as the most bothersome and disruptive classroom behaviors (Alter, Walker, & Landers, 2013); however, how the classroom is managed and the level of student engagement are related factors. Unfortunately, teachers are not always consistent in the use of evidence-based best practices in the area of classroom management (Gage, Scott, Hirn, & MacSuga-Gage, 2018). It is no surprise that educators who are new to the teaching profession cite classroom management as one of the most challenging aspects of their vocation (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Westling, 2010). A chief reason given for leaving the teaching profession is challenging behavior exhibited by students within the classroom (Algozzine, Christian, Marr, McClanahan, & White, 2008). To address this issue, school districts are beginning to embrace the research supporting a shift to a proactive approach that encourages positivity and increasing self-esteem, through the creation of supportive, safe, and respectful environments (Marzano et al., 2003; Noddings, 2002; Osher et al., 2007). Understanding the complexity of disruptive student behavior can be difficult and requires training, mentorship, and support. An ill-prepared teacher

can cause serious harm in the form of student alienation and escalation of a behavior issue. For this reason, teachers must be able to manage student behavior, understand the root causes of misbehavior, and distinguish the cultural differences in what is considered appropriate behavior. Consequences for off-task or disruptive behavior often result in some element of verbal shaming in front of other students or removing the student from the classroom. The teacher's role in the escalation of the behavior can complicate and exacerbate the maladaptive behavior being exhibited. This escalation and lack of consistent response may increase the chance of repeated off-task behavior (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016). Anti-social behavior is a predictor of future delinquency (Sprague & Walker, 2016; Thomas, Bierman, Thompson, Powers & Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2008). Possessing efficacious strategies to address misbehavior within the educational setting is critical for both teacher retention and student emotional well-being. A study by Butler and Monda-Amaya (2016) noted that when a teacher can identify their role in behavior being addressed improperly, their classroom management skills improve. Interestingly, within this study, elementary and secondary preservice teachers had differing views on what constitutes challenging or improper behavior. This incongruence may seems obvious because behaviors that are inappropriate may change with a student age, it begs the question of whether the disposition of an elementary teacher is different from that of a secondary teacher, as well as whet her the desire to work with specific age groups brings differing values of what is considered appropriate behavior.

Misbehavior by a student can cause a disruption in the learning environment; however, the perception of the behavior and the student's propensity to eventually correct or self-regulate can become an important factor in their future interventions throughout their time in the school system. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders are frequently removed from the

classroom, and consequently receive less quality instructional time (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). However, inexperienced or biased teachers may inappropriately label and exclude students who are simply not yet able to self-regulate or are expecting effects from the bioecological system that they experience outside of the classroom (Geiger, 2000). In a study conducted by Tidwell, Flannery, and Lewis-Palmer (2003), teachers exhibited ineffective and harmful techniques, such as shaming, threatening, or embarrassing students to quell off task behavior. Although students from marginalized communities who attend schools that lack resources may display more disruptive characteristics, studies have found that the implementation of positive, rather than punitive, strategies will be inclined to yield fewer disruptive students (Emmer, 1994; Thomas et al., 2008).

Student safety during the school day has become an issue that has drawn national attention, beginning with the Columbine shootings and numerous others that have since followed. Clearly, these events are horrific acts that require further analysis, appropriate measures to ensure staff and student safety, and preventative strategies to minimize further violent incidents. However, when addressing discipline as a whole with the school setting, the lines can become blurred when determining an appropriate response to misbehavior. Hyman and Perone (1998) maintained that the more stringent day-to-day discipline tactics have a negative effect and may cause more push back from students. Skiba and Peterson (2000) posited that appropriate application of a consequence is a necessary tool; yet, the consequence in and of itself will not be adequate in changing behavior. The purpose of a consequence, or discipline, is to teach the student appropriate skills to refrain from future infractions and understand the reasons why the act was inappropriate. In the most basic stages of learning and Piaget's stages of development, children will commit certain mistakes, and through these mistakes they will

increase their social competence (Piaget, 1964). Incidents that typically occur in most any elementary classroom—such as excessive talking, getting out of an assigned seat, and being inattentive—are still likely to occur in spite of the teacher providing clear and consistent classroom rules. For the rules of the classroom to be impactful, they must be augmented by creating a truly caring and safe environment (Geiger, 2000). As schools determine and implement their expectations for appropriate behavior and school safety, how the teacher and site administration respond to this behavior is most critical. Even though many schools have developed a matrix that simplifies the offense-punishment procedure, assigning consequences is not quite that simple. Each student is unique, the nature of the misbehavior is different in each setting, and most importantly, the root cause of the misbehavior has to be taken into account to achieve the desired effect of changing the behavior. Developing and implementing evidence-based responses to meet the behavioral needs of each student is a critical element of maintaining an environment that is safe and conducive to learning.

Chapter Summary

An analysis of the literature revealed that little research has been conducted on the extent to which teacher-initiated classroom management strategies and teachers' attitude can deter or alter a juvenile's path into gang affiliation and the criminal justice system. It is vital that researchers find a way to revisit teacher behavior in regard to classroom management beliefs and practices in terms of evidence-based practices (Gage et al., 2018). Exclusionary practices in education can be a contributing factor in the STPP, yet the literature review revealed that a link exists between exclusionary practices and suspensions or expulsions, often occurring in middle school and beyond. The manner in which exclusion occurs can be subtle or overt; regardless, it can play an important role in student disengagement, laying the foundation for a student to seek

acceptance and affirmation from an alternative source. For students who reside in marginalized communities and have an increased chance of exposure to gang affiliation, scholastic engagement is critical. Disengagement can begin as early as first grade and can intensify by adolescence. Many of the studies on determining the age at which a child is most at-risk for becoming affiliated with a gang suggest a range between the ages of 12-15. There is overwhelming research that elucidates the importance of implementing interventions and establishing strategies to improve attachment to the school environment prior to sixth grade. However, the specific relationship to becoming gang-affiliated and becoming potentially incarcerated in the juvenile justice system is scant. Consequently, gang affiliation could increase the chance of becoming incarcerated and placed into the juvenile justice system. Unlike many STPP frameworks, this researcher postulates that the school has an influence on a student's path to incarceration upon beginning their education. To ameliorate school engagement and conduct appropriate interventions, it is essential for schools to adopt a focus on K-sixth grade classroom management strategies, teacher behavior, and methods to enhance engagement.

For this reason, the researcher conducted interviews and made observations within the school environment to gain a better understanding of their sociological, cultural, and environmental factors. Interviews with former students of the Ag Town community who became affiliated with the gang life were interviewed, along with individuals who are involved with various aspects of the juvenile justice system. The observations and interviews were used to explore educational perspectives, cultural paradigms, and social controls.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with the rationale for this critical ethnographic study and the approach for the focus of the inquiry, followed by a description of the research design, setting, population, sample, and sampling procedures. It continues with the human subjects considerations, the instrumentation, the manner in which data were collected, the management of the data, and the methods utilized to analyze the data. This methodology chapter also describes the questions, design, data collection procedures, analysis and potential limitations of the study.

The purpose of this study was to investigate what influence or impact, if any, a student's educational experience prior to entering middle school may have on their desire to affiliate, associate, or otherwise become involved with the gang culture. The overarching research question that guided this study was as follows: What role, if any, does school disengagement have on a student's entrance into the school to prison pipeline?

Theoretical Framework

Through a critical ethnographic viewpoint, the approach to this study was intended to address the issue of whether or not educators could be the frontline defense against gang involvement, gang-related violence, and the likelihood of incarceration that occurs to those who affiliate with gangs. This study explored the responsibility of the educator in the disengagement of street socialized youth who reside in marginalized communities of Central Coast County. According to Madison (2005), the goal of critical ethnography studies of marginalized groups is to bring to light social injustices on their behalf and voice concern for their particular oppression. The strategy employed was to conduct a critical ethnographic study of lived experiences of incarcerated, gang affiliated Latino youth, as well as a variety of county and school district

personnel that can provide insight into this dilemma that has been currently addressed and influenced through a law enforcement framework. Since many of my former students have been raised in this community and attended school in juvenile hall where I taught, this phenomenon naturally moved me to study what, if any, effect teachers could have on this population while they were in the impressionable years of school, specifically those years prior to middle school. The intent was to research how educators could improve their practices to meet the needs of this demographic and then use the information to educate others in the teaching profession.

A theoretical framework was utilized to guide this critical ethnographic mode of inquiry, studying marginalized groups through semi-structured interviews of incarcerated or formerly individuals who were raised in Central Coast County and attended one of the school districts within a 40-mile radius of Ag Town. Observations were conducted in five first grade classrooms within two school districts within the Central Coast County. Interviews of new and experienced teachers were conducted to assess their philosophy (or lack thereof) on discipline, classroom management, and inclusion. Interviews were conducted with school administrators, teacher credentialing program managers, a criminal defense attorney, a county probation officers, and counselors. Comparing perceptions, biases, judgments, and perceived best practices for these diverse groups gave a unique perspective from multiple viewpoints.

Research Design

This qualitative critical ethnographic study employed a cross-sectional approach through the utilization of semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis Madison (2005) asserted that in order to begin the undertaking of critical ethnography, it is imperative to acknowledge the ethical responsibility of confronting the embedded lack of fairness and inequity in a specific community. Ethnographic research is incumbent upon the collection of data from

those who have lived the experience. According to Creswell (2013), this type of data is most often collected through observations and interviews. The interviews, observations, and document analysis as the chosen method were designed to elicit an in-depth understanding of the lived educational experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals who currently affiliate or have previously affiliated with one of the two primary Latino gangs in Central Coast County. School personnel, probation officers, counselors, and members of the juvenile justice system were recruited for interviews.

In order to analyze current classroom behavior management and educational practices, as well as social controls that influence students' trajectory through their pre-adolescent education, public K-six school teachers employed in the two major school districts in Central Coast County were the primary focus of the research. The rationale for interviewing elementary school teachers was to ascertain classroom management strategies, their level of cultural proficiency, and perceptions of what is perceived to be acceptable behavior at their respective sites. The goal of this study was to gain insight into teachers' beliefs about classroom management and behavior intervention strategies. For students to have a greater chance at successful and positive educational experiences, it is vital that intervention and prevention occur in early childhood education (Kern, DuPaul, Volpe, & Sokol, 2007). Kindergarten and first-grade teachers are often the first people outside of the child's home that will notice and respond to challenging behaviors; if they are armed with effective behavior management skills, they will have the opportunity to alter or improve their students' educational path (Polirstok & Gottlieb, 2006).

According to Townsend (2000), students who come from a socioeconomic status that is lower than the national average and who reside in low-income urban areas are likely to be disciplined more harshly than their more fortunate peers. Research is limited on whether or not

perceptions and beliefs about effective classroom management strategies vary among teachers who teach in districts with a larger population of low socioeconomic status students and if there is a relationship between the school site and the support of consequential behavior management strategies. To augment the details provided by classroom educators, interviews were conducted with school administrators within two primary school districts in Central Coast County, a juvenile justice social worker, a school counselor, a retired Central Coast county probation officer, a criminal defense attorney, and a retired judge. The researcher interviewed one former teacher with over 35 years of elementary school teaching experience and a current teacher with over 35 years of teaching experience who taught in nearby districts. A school administrator in a neighboring county who was raised in a Central Coast County community with high gang violence was interviewed.

Classroom observations were conducted with field notes being the chosen method to document observations made during the classroom visits. The observations gave context to the responses to the interview questions. The researcher engaged in document analysis of previously recorded life history accounts of the educational experiences of current, former, or gang members. The strategy of analyzing three types of data enabled the researcher to triangulate the information collected.

Through this approach, the researcher interviewed two current or formerly incarcerated individuals who currently affiliate or have previously affiliated with one of the two primary Latino gangs in Central Coast County, one current or former Central Coast County Probation Officers, five current or former elementary school teachers in one of the two primary school districts in Central Coast County, one veteran teacher from a district adjacent to the two focus districts, two school site administrators, two County Office of Education administrators, one

juvenile justice social worker, a school counselor, a criminal defense attorney who represented juvenile offenders, and a retired judge from Central Coast County.

In order to gain access to some of the groups, I relied on individuals who could vouch for my intent and trustworthiness. Creswell (2007) referred to these people as *gatekeepers*, or individuals who allow the researcher to have greater ease in obtaining interviews, observing lifestyles, and obtaining authentic data. In most cases, the interviews were of a semi-structured nature, allowing for a qualitative study approach that afforded an inquiry approach designed to explore the unique aspects of this phenomenon. This approach was appropriate for this study because it sought to explore the lived experiences of the people who have been directly involved with either current or former gang members, as well as the individuals who have been part of the county system that has attempted to provide resources, controls, or support. Creswell posited that critical ethnography is appropriate qualitative inquiry if the aim is to ascertain how a particular cultural group operates and the various barriers they may face, such as dominance and resistance. It provides a systematic approach of inquiry to elicit detailed information from members of the educational structure that is interacting with the street socialized youth from this marginalized community.

Setting

The research within school settings was conducted at three elementary school sites within two public school districts, all of which are accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The districts are located within Central Coast County. Within the districts, the focus of the research took place in the K-6 grade environment only. These interviews with teachers and school administrators took place with those who are employed, or have been employed, at one of the two districts. The total student enrollment and demographics at these sites are listed in Tables

1-3. The specific school demographics are listed in Tables 2 and 3 (California Department of

Education, n.d.)

Table 1

Elementary School Student Population of Each School District

District	Population
East Side Elementary School District	8835
Seabreeze Unified School District	5127

Note. To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms are used to refer to participating school districts.

Table 2

Elementary Student Demographics within East Side Unified School District

Ethnic Group	Percentage of Student Body
African-American	.003%
American Indian	.002
Asian	.006
Filipino	.006
Hispanic	.89
Pacific Islander	.002
White	.02
Two or more	.004
Not reported	.05

Table 3

Elementary Student Population within Seabreeze Unified School District

Ethnic Group	Percentage of Student Body
African-American	.07
American Indian	.001
Asian	.03
Filipino	.027
Hispanic	.58
Pacific Islander	.01
White	.29
Two or more	.07
Not reported	0

The total number of teachers in each district are listed in Tables 4 and 5. The groups were disaggregated by White and Latino teachers; however, other races are not reflected (California Department of Education, n.d.).

Table 4

Number of Hispanic and White Teachers within the East Side Unified School District (2018-19)

Group	Total Number (%)
Total Number of Teachers	358
Number of Hispanic Teachers	208 (72%)
Number of White Teachers	92 (25%)

Table 5

Number of Hispanic and White Teachers within Seabreeze Unified School District (2018-19)

Group	Total Number (%)
Total Number of Teachers	263
Number of Hispanic Teachers	44 (16%)
Number of White Teachers	212 (80%)

Populations, Sample, and Sampling Procedures

Population. This study focused on four distinct groups of individuals. First, the study sought to identify subjects who have either previously been gang affiliated or who are currently gang affiliated with one of the two gangs previously described factions and received their K-6 education at one of two identified districts in this study. Secondly, this researcher identified current or retired elementary educators who teach, or have taught, in one of the aforementioned districts in Kindergarten through sixth grade. Within this group of educators, the researcher interviewed site administrators and teacher induction personnel responsible for the training of new teachers. The third group with whom this researcher conducted interviewed were those employed in county or city agencies, such as social workers, juvenile probation personnel, behavioral health

workers, criminal defense attorneys, and a retired Superior Court Judge who served as a Juvenile Court judge for several years.

The subjects interviewed in this study have a connection to Central Coast County through their current employment or through their educational experience and subsequent gang affiliation. Teachers, school district personnel, probation officers, social workers, counselors, community members, attorneys, or individuals who fell within the sphere of the social framework of educational construct were contacted. Each teacher whose classroom was observed and who was interviewed was employed in one of the two aforementioned school districts, one being the largest district located on the coastal portion of the County, Seabreeze Unified School District, and the other district, East Side Unified School District, which is located in Ag Town. In total, the Seabreeze Unified School District serves 5,127 students in grades K-5, whereas East Side Unified School District serves 8,835 students in grades K-6. They have a combined Latino student population of over 10,000. The teachers who were observed and interviewed possess a multiple subject credential in the State of California and are teaching in an elementary school setting. Two of the teachers had in excess of 15 years of experience, two teachers had 5 or more years of experience, and one teacher was in her first year of teaching. Each district serves K-12 students and is a public school district.

School administrators interviewed were employed in one of the two districts and possessed a clear administrative credential and had been employed at least 3 years in the capacity of site principal or higher. All individuals who were employed in the capacity of social worker, probation officer, attorney, or related positions, met the minimum requirements for licensing under the guidelines of the State of California. Individuals were currently employed or retired in good standing from a Central Coast County agency.

Sample. In order to best inform this study, a purposeful sample was utilized. The participants who were identified as a current or former gang members were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Over the age of 18.

2. Identify or have been classified as a member of one of the two major Latino prison gangs in California.

3. Received their public school education prior to gang affiliation in one of the two aforementioned identified districts.

4. Have been incarcerated for at least 6 months since turning 18 years old.

The participants who were identified as elementary educators were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Possess or have possessed a California teaching credential.

2. Taught in a K-6 grade assignment at one of the two identified districts.

The participants who were identified as elementary school administrators were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Possessed a California preliminary or clear administrative credential.

2. Are currently a site principal at an elementary school in one of the two identified districts.

The participants who were identified as County Office of Education administrators were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Possessed a California clear administrative credential.

2. Are currently at senior level management positions within the County Office of Education and are involved with the teacher training and induction programs.

The participants who were identified as social workers, counselors, behavioral health professionals, probation staff, law enforcement personnel, criminal defense attorney, or judge, were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Be currently or previously employed in Central Coast County.

2. Have at least 3 years' experience in their respective fields.

3. As a course of their employment, work with youth who have been incarcerated or are identified as Latino male gang members in Central Coast County.

The researcher interviewed two individuals who currently affiliate or have affiliated with one of the two primary Latino gangs in Central Coast County, a retired Central Coast county Probation Officers, a criminal defense attorney, a retired Superior Court judge, and seven current or former elementary school teachers in school districts in Central Coast County, two school administrators one of two primary school districts in Central Coast County, two County Office of Education Administrators, a juvenile justice social worker, a school counselor, and one high school administrator from a neighboring county. This method of sampling afforded this researcher the opportunity to ask the participants questions regarding their similar experiences.

Sampling procedures. The researcher identified current or former gang affiliated subjects who meet the sampling criteria through personal contacts. Educators were recruited via an email request through the school district email, with follow up personal phone calls to site administrators. This procedure was cleared through each district office and then cleared via the site principal. County personnel were contacted through networking contacts. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to acquire data and information that would help to develop best practices for the effective use of classroom management strategies that have both immediate and long-term benefits for the student. All necessary precautions were taken to ensure that participants

were adequately informed that their identity would be kept confidential. The manner in which confidentiality would be maintained was disclosed in the invitation to participate in the study itself. Participants acknowledged their understanding of the use of the information obtained, the confidentiality safeguards, and the consent to participate voluntarily by their signed acknowledgement of the voluntary consent form (Appendix A). Interviews were conducted at mutually agreed upon locations. Each participant was given the researcher's personal contact information to allow for effectual communication between both parties. Access to the hard drive was password protected. Hard copies were printed as a backup source of data. Hard copy data is stored in the researcher's personal residence in a locked safe.

Human Subject Considerations

Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board (IRB) first approved the research. Within the school setting, the superintendent designee approved the request to allow the interviews and classroom observations to be conducted within the district and allow access to the teachers. Once the request to conduct the study was approved, school-assigned email addresses were requested of each teacher as a means of contact and communication of the nature of the research, recruitment, description of the interview protocol and duration of the classroom observations, informed consent, and administration of the interviews. Observations were only conducted in school classrooms. Site principals were informed of the intent to contact their staff and conduct research. The researcher recognized that site principals had the choice to allow or disallow the teachers to participate.

Teachers were recruited via email after being referred by their site principal. Participants were fully credentialed by the State of California, possessed a multiple-subject designated credential, and were teaching in a first-grade class in a full-time capacity for the school district.

The participants met all of the inclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria were any non-possession or non-assignment of any one of the inclusion criteria. The screening for inclusion and exclusion criteria occurred via the California Teacher Credentialing website, which allows for credential verification. Respondents were asked to report their years of full-time K-12 teaching experience. Before data collection, separate consent forms were distributed to the teachers via their school email accounts and returned electronically via a secure Google account. Participation by individuals who are incarcerated did not garner them any reduction in sentence, nor did it provide them with any privileges as a result of their participation.

All necessary precautions were taken to ensure that all participants were informed that their identity would be kept confidential. The manner in which confidentiality would be maintained was disclosed in the invitation to participate and prior to the interviews and observations themselves. Participants acknowledged their understanding of the information collected in the interviews and observations, the confidentiality safeguards, and the consent to participate voluntarily by signing the consent form (Appendix A).

All interviewees were advised that participation in the survey was voluntary and their participation, or lack thereof, would not be communicated to their supervisors, correctional staff, or any other member of the school district or county agency. Participants were notified of the manner in which they could contact the researcher if they had additional questions or comments. Participants had the ability to print all consent and verification forms for their personal records. Hard copies were printed as a backup source of data. Hard copy data were stored in the researcher's personal residence in a locked safe. The superintendent's designee of each district or his approved the request to allow the interviews and classroom observations to be conducted within the district and allow access to the teachers and other personnel. Permission to interview current

county personnel was cleared through department heads of the respective divisions, when applicable. Within the school setting, site principals had the choice to allow or disallow the teachers to participate. Approval by Pepperdine University's IRB added additional oversight and participant protection. The ethical criteria required by the IRB provides for the respect of the participants, reduction of any potential risks, and the adherence to maintaining fair and just procedures.

Each site had a principal assigned to the oversight of the school and all principals report to an assistant superintendent. Since principals have the right to allow or disallow the participation in interviews or classroom observations, principals were contacted via phone or email before any invitation to participate was made. The nature of the research and manner of data collection was explained. All potential participants in this study were over the age of 18 and were informed that their participation was voluntary. The total number of participants that agreed to respond or not respond was not conveyed to the district. The potential benefits to participants were the acquisition of data and information that would help to develop best practices for the effective use of classroom management strategies that have both immediate and long-term benefits for the student. All necessary precautions were taken to ensure that participants were adequately informed that their identity would be kept confidential.

Participants acknowledged their understanding of the use of the interviews and classroom observations, the confidentiality safeguards, and the consent to voluntarily participate was documented via their signing of the consent form. Interviews were conducted at locations that provided adequate privacy. Data were stored on the researcher's hard drive and was password protected. Hard copies were printed as a backup source of data. Hard copy data were stored in the researcher's personal residence in a locked safe.

Instrumentation

      The data gathering instruments in this study were unique to the respective groups, and each

instrument contained a series of questions related to the main research question. These instruments

were created prior to the scheduled interviews. Spradley (1979) maintained that fieldwork is the

hallmark of cultural anthropology. Fieldwork involves observations that in turn generate questions

that are both broad and specific. The interview questions were created specifically for this study

and were designed to be applied within the qualitative inquiry and critical ethnographic disciplines.

Table 6

Methodology Alignment Chart

	Research Questions			
Data Collection Strategies	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	RQ 4
Semi-Structured Interviews	X	X	X	X
Ethnographic Interviews	X	X		

Table 7

Relationship among Research Question, Interview Questions, and Literature

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Literature Sources
Research Question 1: What are educators' beliefs regarding best practices for culturally relevant classroom management and pedagogy in schools located in marginalized regions of Central Coast County?	Educator Questionnaire 1. What strategies do you use to increase student connectedness? 2. How would you describe the level of importance that teacher-student relationships have in preventing student disengagement? 3. How would you describe your proficiency in the utilization of culturally relevant classroom management strategies? 4. What intervention strategies do you use for students who exhibit behavior problems in school? 5. Describe how you interact with families and include them in their child's education? 6. important do you feel the student-teacher relationship is in the student's overall educational experience? 7. To what degree do you believe the teacher/school plays in a child's level of school engagement? 8. To what extent do you feel there is a connection to juvenile delinquency and a child's school experience or connection with the school? 9. To what extent do you feel the school has a responsibility to prevent juvenile delinquency and possible gang affiliation? 10. What suggestions, if any, would you have for elementary teachers and school administrator as it pertains to increasing student engagement?	Ainsworth (1979) Balfanz et al. (2007) Conchas and Vigil (2012) Cramer et al. (2014) Croninger and Lee (2001) Ferrara (2015) Finn (1989) Hamre and Pianta (2001) Jennings and Greenberg (2009) Lane, Wehby, and Cooley (2006) Lareau and Shumar (1996) Patterson et al. (2007) Skinner and Belmont (1993) Spivack and Cianci (1987) Wehlage and Rutter (1985)

(continued)

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Literature Sources
Research Question 2: To what extent might the classroom culture, relationships, and classroom management strategies employed by teachers affect student engagement?	Educator Questionnaire 1. What strategies do you use to increase student connectedness? 2. How would you describe the level of importance that teacher-student relationships have in preventing student disengagement? 3. How would you describe your proficiency in the utilization of culturally relevant classroom management strategies? 4. What intervention strategies do you use for students who exhibit behavior problems in school? 5. Describe how you interact with families and include them in their child's education? 6. How important do you feel the student-teacher relationship is in the student's overall educational experience? 7. To what degree do you believe the teacher/school plays in a child's level of school engagement? 8. To what extent do you feel there is a connection to juvenile delinquency and a child's school experience or connection with the school? 9. To what extent do you feel the school has a responsibility to prevent juvenile delinquency and possible gang affiliation? 10. What suggestions, if any, would you have for elementary teachers and school administrator as it pertains to increasing student engagement?	Ainsworth (1979) Balfanz et al. (2007) Conchas and Vigil (2012) Cramer et al. (2014) Croninger and Lee (2001) Ferrara (2015) Finn (1989) Hamre and Pianta (2001) Jennings and Greenberg (2009) Lane, Wehby, and Cooley (2006) Lareau and Shumar (1996) Patterson et al. (2007) Skinner and Belmont (1993) Spivack and Cianci (1987) Wehlage and Rutter (1985)
Research Question 3: How do currently or formerly incarcerated Latino males who claim affiliation with gangs or have been identified by the criminal justice systems as a gang member perceive the effect, if any, that their pre-kindergarten through sixth grade educational experiences had on their affiliation with a criminal street gang or entrance into the criminal justice system?	Affiliate Questionnaire 1. Describe your school experiences from Kindergarten through sixth grade. 2. Who was your favorite teacher during elementary school? Why? 3. Did you have any teachers that you didn't care for? Why? 4. Do you feel you had a good relationship with teachers at your school? Describe? 5. Did you ever feel that you were not wanted at school or were being pushed out? If so, when did that begin? 6. Did you have any behavior issues in school? When did they start? 7. Were you ever suspended? If so, can you describe the circumstances? 8. How old were you when you became affiliated with a street gang? 9. How old were you when you were first arrested? 10. Do you feel there was any connection to your school experience and your decision to become involved with gangs? 11. What factors, if any, could have caused you to avoid becoming gang affiliated? 12. What suggestions, if any, would you have for elementary teachers and school administrators?	Conchas and Vigil (2012) Coopersmith (2009) Croninger and Lee (2001) Dembo et al. (2007) Eccles and Midgley (1989) Finn (1989) Henry et al. (2012) Hill et al. (1999) Howard and Egley (2005) Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015) Rios (2011) Rudasill et al. (2010) Skiba et al. (2011) Skiba et al. (2011) Skinner and Belmont (1993) Spivack and Cianci (1987) Sprague and Walker (2000) Wald and Losen (2003) Wehlage and Rutter (1985)

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Literature Sources
Research Question 4: What do various individuals who work within the juvenile justice system, social workers, school counselors, believe are the significant causes or factors, if any, that lead a juvenile to become involved with a criminal street gang?	Probation/Social Worker/Police Questionnaire 1. Describe your experience working with gang affiliated youth. 2. Have you observed any effective programs, strategies, or interventions that have had an impact on the reduction in gang violence? 3. What do you feel is needed to reduce gang violence or gang membership? 4. Is there a crucial time in a juvenile's life that you feel impacts their desire to affiliate with gangs? 5. What factors, if any, do you feel cause a juvenile to begin affiliating with a criminal street gang in Central Coast County? 6. How impactful do you feel a juvenile's educational experience is in his path to resisting or affiliating with gangs in Central Coast County? 7. Do you feel the educational system should play a more significant role in preventing juvenile delinquency and gang affiliation? 8. What suggestions, if any, would you have for elementary teachers and school administrators?	Conchas and Vigil (2012) Hill et al. (1999) Howell (2010) Howell and Egley (2005) Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015) Rios (2011) Thornberry et al. (2003)

Note. Key research question: What role, if any, does school disengagement have on a student's entrance into the school to prison pipeline?

Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured technique, which afforded the researcher a strategic, planned format. Formal interviews are held with via a specific request at a designated location (Spradley, 1979). The semi-structured interviews permitted the researcher to ask questions that could elicit feedback on the participants' personal, lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews offer the interviewer the ability to refine or refashion the order of the questions. The semi-structured interview has the potential to garner a significant amount of qualitative data in a short period of time (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016).

Ethnographic Interviews

Participant observation in ethnography afforded the researcher the opportunity to ask questions within the time during which the observations were taking place (Spradley, 1979). These questions were related to the research; however, they were spontaneous. Since the questions were not planned, they could not be formatted prior to the research. However, the

questions were recorded in the researcher's fieldwork journal at the time when they were asked. The scene was described, the person queried was identified, and the answer provided was recorded.

Observations. Qualitative observation occurs when field notes are recorded at the research location (Creswell, 2013). This research utilized a non-participant observer methodology and did not ask questions or make any contact with the students or teachers in the classrooms. Lutz (as cited in Frank, 1999) suggested utilizing a micro-macro observational approach in ethnographic studies to provide a perspective of students' ecological environment. This approach provides a more complete and encompassing viewpoint for the observer. This approach affords the researcher the opportunity to compare and contrast not only the environments in which students are socialized, but also the types of communities from which the teachers have originated.

Spradley (1979) recommended a strategy for both critical ethnographic interviews and observations, which he referred to as the *grand tour* approach to inquiry. In this framework, researchers look at the entire scene through a macro perspective. His steps in the grand tour dimension are as follows:

1. *Space:* The physical place or places.

2. *Actor:* The people involved.

3. *Activity:* A set of related acts people do.

4. *Object:* The physical things that are present.

5. *Act:* Single actions people do.

6. *Event:* A set of related activities that people carry out.

7. *Time:* The sequencing that takes place over time.

8. *Goal:* The things people are trying to accomplish.

9. *Feeling*: The emotions felt and expressed. (p. 78)

Once a grand tour is conducted, Spradley recommends conducting a *mini tour,* which follows the same format as the grand tour but has a myopic focus, rather than a broader approach. This process allowed the researcher to describe details in more specificity and depth.

Validity. The instrumentation measures utilized in this study were validated through the process of obtaining critical analysis and feedback by peers and colleagues who possess doctorate degrees. The peer reviewers were able to provide critical feedback and review the data collected. This was accomplished by having these individuals review the process of data collection and the ensuing work product. The review of the work by peer reviewers afforded the researcher the opportunity to gain new perspectives that may have been overlooked or not discovered in the course of identifying themes in the data.

Reliability. According to Creswell (2013), accurate coding is essential when analyzing data. Based on this assertion, the researcher was the primary coder; however, peer reviewers were consulted for their perspective on the data. Creswell advocated using a peer debriefer to allow for an additional interpretation of the data. Bernard et al. (2016) asserted that intercoders, or interraters, should be used when analyzing text in for increased reliability and the potential for recognizing themes that the researcher may have overlooked. Creswell maintained that this adds an additional element of accuracy to the data collection procedure. The recommended strategy of member checking allows those who have been interviewed to check the semi-finished or finished product's major themes, theories, or findings. This strategy allowed the participants to comment on the findings through a follow up interview if they desired; however, none opted for this opportunity.

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Data Collection

Ethnographic observations enable the researcher to obtain a multitude of interpretations that he/she may otherwise not have had. It allows the observer to gain insight into himself/herself, as well as the culture of others. In order to capture a variety of information in the observations, it was necessary to devise a system for recording (Frank, 1999). Frank (1999) suggested taking notes that are descriptive, yet noninterpretive. The grand tour and mini tour strategies were employed to analyze various dimensions within the classroom. This strategy of examination allowed the researcher to view the environment through the eyes of the participants (Spradley, 1979).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over a period of several weeks with all participants of this study. The data collected were analyzed and the researcher identified themes that gauged the sociological and educational factors that contribute to student disengagement and gang affiliation. The data were further analyzed to determine if there was a connection or correlation between the two factors. Once the attributes of the data were examined, themes were identified.

All face to face participant interviews were pre-arranged and were conducted during a single session. Each interviewee was given the questions to be asked to allow for interview preparation. Some participants chose to record their responses in writing prior to the face-to-face interview. The researcher took handwritten summary notes during these interviews and later transcribed them. All participants received the responses recorded by the researcher and had the opportunity to augment or provide clarification to the responses. The participants had the opportunity to provide the researcher with clarifications if they felt they were necessary. In all instances, once the notes had been transcribed and the handwritten notes analyzed, the

handwritten notes were destroyed. The transcribed interviews were stored on a Google drive that can only be accessed by the researcher through a personal passcode. The researcher read the confidentiality and consent forms to the interviewee to if he/she requested additional clarification to confirm understanding and the willingness to participate. The following procedures were adhered to when conducting the interviews:

1. Secure interview location and setting that is mutually agreed upon.

2. Make introduction.

3. Confirm consent and voluntary participation through signed consent form.

4. Review consent form and clarify any questions.

5. Ensure recording device is charged and operable.

6. Test device, if utilized.

7. Review purpose of the study and how data are being utilized.

8. Review interview format and procedures.

9. Confirm with participant that interviewee understands interview may be recorded.

10. Advise interviewees that they are not obligated to answer any question and can ask questions if needed.

11. Identify and introduce interviewee by pseudonym.

12. Begin interview with semi-structured question format.

13. Take notes for review and as a back-up in case of equipment malfunction.

14. Provide interviewee with copy signed consent form and provide researcher's contact information.

15. Transcribe interview and secure data in previously mentioned locked location.

Data Management

A protocol for the management of the data was followed through the collection process. Since there were numerous interviews, it was essential that the data be collected and maintained in a systematic fashion. To accomplish this procedure, data in all forms were stored in a locked location within the researcher's office at his personal residence. Confidentiality was maintained by using aliases for all participants and keeping a record of the aliases to ensure accurate cross-referencing. The list of names and aliases were kept in a locked cabinet with the researcher's personal office. All interviews were categorized under the participant's alias and each interview was catalogued individually upon completion of the interview or transcription.

Data Analysis

The coding method of analysis was utilized for this research because it is a recommended strategy in critical ethnographic studies (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) suggested developing a protocol for the stages of data analysis; however, he maintained that the steps can be visited in a flexible manner. As such, my process consisted of a systematic approach that also gave me the latitude to deviate if necessary. The steps in the process suggested by Creswell are as follows:

1. Acquire the raw data.
2. Organize the data.
3. Read through the data.
4. Code the data.
5. Develop themes and descriptions.
6. Interpret the meaning of the themes.

The data were analyzed initially through an inductive process, then moved into a deductive process as the information was categorized and themes began to emerge. Once the themes were

distinguished, they were recorded into a codebook. Overarching themes were classified as the data were sorted. The codes were pretested on two selected texts to calibrate the analysis. Once calibrated and adjusted, if necessary, the codes were utilized on the remainder of the textual data. Upon initial completion of the coding, the data were reexamined to identify any potential sub-categories that may have existed (Bernard et al., 2016). The data collected from the interviews allowed for further examination and evaluation.

Chapter Summary

This study, which was conducted through an ethnographic framework, sought to examine the experiences, beliefs, and social ecological barriers that Latino students in Central Coast County faced in their early educational experience. This data were derived from a multitude of perspectives that were garnered from interviews and observations. All observations and statements were analyzed, then reviewed through a reflective process by the researcher. Creswell (2013) suggested that researchers utilize reflexivity, a reflection strategy that causes the researcher to be mindful that their own culture, experiences, and can cause the theme to be unnecessarily influenced. Constant and authentic reflection afforded the researcher the opportunity for honest consideration when themes were identified. External peer reviewers were utilized to gain independent perspectives and provide an additional layer of credibility. Through the examination of the data, worthwhile practices were highlighted, and additional practices were recommended for those entrusted with educating marginalized youth as they progress through the public school system.

Prior research has been conducted on the pre-kindergarten through sixth grade school experience and the potential effect of disengagement; however, its effect on youth affiliation with street gangs and the infusion into the STPP is limited. The relationship between the

sociological ecology factors of a marginalized student that integrate with current educational behavior management strategies, coupled with a teacher's disposition, has not been analyzed from this paradigm. The significance of the numerous elements that are set into motion when a student enters the classroom community has not been examined in this vein.

The purpose of this study was to learn about the educational experience of individuals who have resided in Central Coast County and affiliated with one of the two primary street gangs in the county. Their educational experience was studied to ascertain any factors that either impeded or increased their feelings of school connectedness in the years preceding adolescence. The elementary school teachers' beliefs on culturally relevant classroom management and inclusion strategies were analyzed with respect to minority students who reside in the marginalized communities of Central Coast County. To supplement these perspectives, this study aimed to understand the root causes of gang affiliation from the perspectives of school administrators, probation officers, licensed clinical social workers, school counselors, criminal defense attorneys, and a retired Superior Court Judge. The qualitative data collected were examined through a critical ethnographic form of inquiry.

It is pertinent to note that this researcher initially approached this study with the intention of conducting a phenomenological study; however, as the research progressed, it became apparent that this inquiry lent itself more to an ethnographic study due to this researcher's desire to observe, interview, and be in the midst of the individuals I was choosing to study. Frank (1999) posited that teachers conduct ethnographic studies in their classrooms by virtue of their constant presence and observational strategies. Critical ethnographers strive to effect change for the betterment of society by allowing that which is moral to guide their inquiry (Madison, 2005) This method provided insight and clarity into the students' academic paths prior to their entrance

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into the juvenile justice system and decision to affiliate and associate with a street gang. This study also gathered perspectives of the elementary school teachers, administrators, and county personnel that interact with the juveniles once they have entered the criminal justice system. The purpose of gaining a multitude of interpretations was to evaluate and probe the multitude of vantage points that are relevant in attempting to address the balance between effective pedagogy and the need to understand a student's socialization process. It is important to recognize the challenges that occur when students are placed in the care of teachers who may bring their own values based on their socialization, along with their understanding of effective behavior management strategies, which may tend to alienate street-socialized youth as early as kindergarten. This understanding may enlighten school administrators, credentialing program coordinators, and classroom teachers, because this issue is not specifically addressed in teacher credentialing programs or educational professional development. Educators, school administrators, credentialing programs, and community leaders will benefit from this research.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the results of the data that were obtained through responses to three sets of questions posed of three categories of individuals. The first group was current or formerly incarcerated Latino males who have been identified as being affiliated with one of the two major California prison gangs. The second group comprised educators who are either elementary school teachers or administrators. The third group included those who have worked within positions of the juvenile justice system in the capacity of probation officer, defense attorney, and retired Superior Court Judge. Included in the third group were two counselors: one who is a county social worker and the other who is an elementary school counselor. The chapter begins with an introduction and continues with an overview of the problem statement and the methodology utilized to collect the data. The chapter continues with the description of the data and the presentation of findings, which identifies the themes that emerged from the data analysis: environment, interventions, belonging, caring adults, and self worth. Next is a description of the observations made in first grade classrooms in three elementary schools located in two Central Coast County school districts, followed by a summary of the chapter.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate what influence or impact, if any, a student's educational experience prior to entering middle school may have on their desire to affiliate, associate, or otherwise become involved with gang culture. The overarching research question that guided this study was as follows: What role, if any, does school disengagement have on a student's entrance into the school to prison pipeline?

This study employed a qualitative, critical ethnographic framework using a cross-sectional approach that involved semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The purpose of the interviews, observations, and document analysis was to elicit an in-depth understanding of the lived educational experiences of incarcerated individuals who currently affiliate or have affiliated with one of the two primary Latino gangs in Central Coast County. The researcher also analyzed current classroom behavior management and educational practices by first grade school teachers. The rationale for this study was to gain insight into teachers' beliefs about classroom management and behavior intervention strategies. To augment the details provided by classroom educators, interviews were conducted with school administrators within two primary school districts and the Central Coast County Office of Education. A current teacher in a neighboring district, along with a retired teacher from the same district, both of whom have over 35 years of experience in teaching elementary school, were interviewed to garner perspectives from educators who have vast experience in classroom management, child development, and school culture. In order to gain the perspective of the individuals who work in the area of counseling students and probationers, interviews were conducted with a county social worker and a school counselor. To obtain the viewpoint of members of the juvenile justice system, interviews were conducted with a retired probation officer, a criminal defense attorney, and a retired judge who had overseen the juvenile courts. The researcher also interviewed an additional school administrator (Lydia) whom he knew through his professional networking. This administrator works in a neighboring county, but was raised in an area of Central Coast County wrought with gang violence and had a unique perspective to offer. With the exception of Lydia, all of the individuals worked within Central Coast County. Classroom observations were conducted with field notes being the chosen

method to document observations made during the classroom visits to provide contextualization

for the teacher interviews and triangulate the data. Previously recorded life history accounts of

the educational experiences of current or former Latino gang members were analyzed through

document analysis to provide additional perspective and allow the researcher to triangulate the

collected data.

Presentation of Findings

The presentation of findings section begins with the background information on the 19

participants, which includes the assigned pseudonyms, current or former positions, and their

years of experience. Participants are divided into five separate categories, depicted in the

following tables: currently or formerly incarcerated Latino males, elementary school educators,

educational administrators, counselors, and individuals who have worked within the juvenile

justice system. Three separate questionnaires were used for the interviews. Each of the

following three participant groups was asked a different set of interview questions:

(a) incarcerated or formerly incarcerated Latino males (b) elementary teachers and educational

administrators, and (c) counselors and juvenile justice system workers.

Table 8

Incarcerated or Formerly Incarcerated Males

Name	Age
Manny	20
Armando	27

Table 9

Incarcerated or Formerly Incarcerated Males: Document Analysis Subjects

Pseudonym	Years of Schooling	Age Joined Gang
Ernie*	9	13
Tomas*	7	8
Gustavo*	10	11
Marco*	7	12
Ricky*	9	13
Gil*	6	9
Manual*	11	16
Daniel*	9	10
Mike*	8	12
George*	8	8
Brian*	8	10
Shorty*	7	9
Paul*	11	12
Joseph*	11	13
Berto*	10	11
Joe**	7.5	
Ricardo**	8	
Edgar**	8	
Eddie**	9	

Note. * = from Alvarado (2015), ** = from Garcia (2013)

Table 10

Elementary School Educators

Pseudonym	Position	Years of Experience
Zoe	First Grade Teacher	1
Ellen	First Grade Teacher	6
Alicia	First Grade Teacher	9
Christina	First Grade Teacher	24
Jennifer	First Grade Teacher	17
Noelle	Second Grade Teacher	38
George	Retired Elementary Teacher	39

Table 11

Educational Administrators

Pseudonym	Position	Total Years of Experience
Javier	Assistant Superintendent	23
Israel	Director	20
Alan	Elementary Principal	14
Ben	Elementary Principal	14
Lydia	High School Vice Principal	9

Table 12

Counselors

Pseudonym	Position	Total Years of Experience
Michele	County Social Worker	17
Nina	Family School Counselor	5

Table 13

Criminal Justice System Members

Pseudonym	Position	Total Years of Experience
Richard	Retired Probation Officer	27
William	Criminal Defense Attorney	17
Robert	Retired Judge	35

Descriptive Data

The majority of the data collected that emerged from the participants were gathered through face to face interviews; however, in five of the 19 interviews, participants responded to the questions in written form due to unforeseen logistical issues. All participants were provided with the required consent form prior to the interview and were given the same questions based on their participant group. All participants were provided with the questions and informed consent at least one week prior to the interviews so that they had ample time to review the information and scope of the research. The rationale was to allow participants sufficient time to reflect on the

questions and yield richer responses. In one instance, an incarcerated male replied in writing due

to restrictions and complex logistics of participating in a face-to-face interview. Some

educational administrators requested to respond in writing due to the flexibility it would allow as

a result of their busy and irregular schedules. The majority of the interviewees were referred to

this researcher through snowball sampling and the researcher's networking contacts. Included in

the data analysis are the responses from eight previously recorded life history accounts of

formerly incarcerated and self-identified Latino gang affiliates. These responses were

documented as part of two separate doctoral dissertation research studies conducted in Southern

California within the past 6 years (Alvarado, 2015; Garcia, 2013). Document analysis strategies

were utilized to analyze these data and were considered when developing the themes. The

interview questions were analyzed to ascertain common areas of inquiry from the three distinct

groups of participants and the following categories arose: (a) student engagement strategies,

(b) intervention/prevention, (c) cultural awareness, (d) causal factors, and (e) belief that the

school has a responsibility to prevent delinquency. In the process of analyzing the data, five key

themes emerged in each of the participant groups. The data collection process began with an

inductive coding technique and moved to a theory-driven deductive coding approach. Creswell

(2013) recommended using a peer debriefer to allow for an additional interpretation of the data.

Two peer debriefers familiar with coding and analyzing qualitative data were given the data for

supplementary analysis. The following table depicts the themes for each participant group and

the synthesis of those themes based on the final analysis.

Table 14

Themes

Lived Experiences of Incarcerated Latino Males	Educators	Juvenile Justice System Members and Counselors	Synthesis of Themes
Environment	Cultural Awareness and Family Connection	Environment	Environment
Learning Difficulties	Positive Relationships as Interventions	Interventions	Timely and Effective Interventions
Belonging	Belonging	Belonging	Belonging
Caring Adult	Caring Adult	Caring Adult	Caring Adult
Self-Worth, or lack thereof, due to dysfunction, academic struggles, and poverty	Self Esteem/Worth via positive relationships and experiences	Self-Worth gained through affirmation and status provided by the gang	Self-Worth

Environment

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory illustrates environmental influences

that either directly or indirectly affect a child as he/she enters the educational environment.

Environmental factors can be interpreted through different paradigms depending upon one's

vantage point. Many of the young men alluded to the poverty, gangs, and that they experienced

in their homes and neighborhoods as having an effect on their socialization and school

experience. Their experiences outside the school setting appeared to be an associated factor that

influenced their ability to perform well in school either academically or behaviorally. Their

environment was described as the neighborhood, the experiences inside their home, and various

pressures placed on them due to residing in marginalized communities plagued by gangs and

violence. Members of the juvenile justice system and counselors viewed the environment

similarly and maintained that the negative aspects of a marginalized community can be an

aggravating factor for youth and their path to becoming involved in delinquency. Educators

described their interaction with the students' lives outside the school setting as being important to address; however, their response spoke to the importance of cultural awareness, family communication, and understanding the challenges students from underserved communities face.

Student experiences. Armando described his early school experience as being affected by his family's migration due to their employment as lettuce cutters in the agricultural industry, along with the termination of their marriage when he was a small child.

> My parents separated when I was 2 years old. They both worked in the lettuce fields, which they followed the lettuce season to Arizona. My school experiences was affected because of the constant migration. There were times when I attended three different schools in one year. During first grade I was placed in second grader class and I would get picked on. At times to the point of fist fights.

As Armando began experiencing academic difficulties due to the frequent school changes, he also witnessed domestic violence within his home, which led to his belief that fighting was permissible, causing him difficulties in elementary school.

> When I was growing up I witnessed a lot of domestic abuse. My mother's then boyfriend, when I attended elementary school, would physically abuse her. As I grew up I believed that violence was okay. When older kids would bully me I would fight them back. The lack of understanding of my emotions gained me popularity amongst kids, but also, headaches for the teachers.

> While in sixth grade, he became disenchanted with school and felt that his teacher didn't like him. During this time, he became influenced by other students who wore certain "colors" and listened to a particular style of music. In lieu of going to class, he would skip school or

sometimes go to the library to help the librarians sort books. Armando said he felt this experience contributed to his path to incarceration.

Several of the young men described dysfunctional home lives that included domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse. Armando said that his parents separated when he was young and when his mother began seeing another man whom she allowed to live in the home. He stated that the boyfriend was abusive, which affected him inside and outside the home, to the point that he couldn't concentrate while in school. Three men in the study conducted by Alvarado (2015) reported having similar experiences. Brian described his mother's alcoholic and abusive boyfriends as a significant issue in his ability to have normalcy in his life. He stated that he and his mother would ride the transit bus all night because they couldn't go home. He said he would attend school the following day despite being up all night on the bus. George stated he started doing drugs and using alcohol at age 6. He said his father was an alcoholic and that his home life was so difficult that he would often stay somewhere other than his home. Mike described his home life and surrounding as "negative." He recounted his home life as follows: "My surroundings were always negative. My Dad left us at a young age. He went to prison. We didn't have a house. Just like a garage. Everyone around us was always drunk, doing drugs, or fighting" (Alvarado, 2015, p. 68). Manny felt that his gang affiliation was due to the influence of that particular lifestyle within his family and in his neighborhood. Although he indicated he was having behavioral issues in third or fourth grade and began fighting more frequently in sixth grade, he believed that his surroundings outside of the educational system were more influential that his connection, or lack thereof, with the school.

I wouldn't have become involved If I didn't grow up around the gang lifestyle. It was in my family and around me when I wasn't in school. It was my home life and what I grew up around. I think I would have become involved either way.

For males who reside in marginalized communities, respect and masculinity become a significant factor in their actions (Conchas & Vigil, 2012). The environmental pressure to not show weakness as a means of survival influenced them strongly. In Manny's case, he maintained that he began fighting as a result of being disrespected at school. The influences that dictate responses from these students can carry over into the school yard. Manny said he was first arrested in seventh grade and joined a gang at age 12 or 13: "sixth grade is when I began getting suspended and was fighting. I would fight because people disrespected me."

The need to maintain respect and dignity become influential components of these young men's development. Living in an environment where people may seek to prey on the weak can cause young men to exhibit more aggressive behaviors or seek protection in the form of gang affiliation.

Educators. Both teachers and administrators acknowledged that their students faced enormous challenges within their neighborhoods and homes. They sought out strategies to minimize those barriers and were cognizant of the value of forging strong lines of communication and relationships with the families. Javier, an assistant superintendent in Central Coast County who was raised in Ag Town, taught elementary school and became a principal in a high need district in Central Coast County. He commented on the importance of understanding the students' home life:

It is important to understand the home context and to ask students to meet the expectations based on where they are at. Cultural sensitivity is at the heart of what we

do. Understanding the students' background and tailoring it to the expectations is essential. You need to identify their strengths such as resilience and have the talent to identify their resilience. Adapting our strategies and having a respect for what our students value is important. It's important to recognize that the staff has differences and to build a sense of respect. It begins with helping families understand what school is about, what is appropriate, and what is inappropriate. Many families that have come from Mexico to parents only have fourth or fifth grade education and they would never question a teacher so they would not advocate for their child's education because they don't feel it's their place most of the time the families are primarily worried about their students behavior and not their academics. It's important to let them know that they can advocate and how the American system works teacher should know that you can't teach students if their basic needs are not met. Teachers should be able to connect families with the appropriate resources. Visit the neighborhood where these families live, I would drive or walk the streets. I would visit their homes that will influence how you treat your students.

Cultural awareness emerged as a sub-theme that could mitigate the negative aspects of the marginalized environment by understanding and partnering with students' families. Because educators cannot control what may occur outside of the school site, they maintained that strong communication and relationships with families were an effective strategy for increasing student success and forming stronger relationships with families. This notion was supported by Ben, an elementary school principal, who stated:

I have found that often the cultural barriers (I'm a White, middle class male) make it harder for me to "connect" with some families, and I'm striving to create a space where

families feel like it's theirs, that their voices truly matter. I like strategies that empower

communities to mobilize to problem solve.

Alan, an elementary school principal, echoed the importance of proactively enhancing

relationships with families as a means to increase engagement despite external factors that may

inhibit the student and families' experience with the school:

I seek to maximize family involvement in their child's school experience in a variety of

ways; from the micro level of daily interactions in the parking lot during both morning

drop-off and dismissal allowing for a high number of contacts on a daily basis to

quarterly Arts Events Nights as well as Student-Led Conferences that promote student

ownership and a clearer role for families to serve a dedicated supportive role. A number

of factors beyond the school day influence a child's level of school experience, especially

working in a traditionally low SED population - from appropriate hours of sleep to

nutrition in the morning to all the challenges that come with living in an underserved

population, while the teacher/school cannot directly influence those factors - there is an

incredible influence we have in supporting a positive school experience for our children

that will ultimately promote a strong level of school engagement.

As educators acknowledge the value of strong family partnerships and ongoing reflection

in regard to their own level of cultural proficiency, it is challenging to counterbalance the

environment where many of the students reside. According to Lydia, a lifelong resident of

Central Coast County and school administrator who is well versed in the challenges young

Latino males face in communities where the gang lifestyle is pervasive:

We have families in which gang affiliation is a generational issue. Kids have grown up

around gang members who also happen to be their uncle, fathers, grandfathers, aunts, etc.

It is difficult to differentiate between gang life and just their particular life.

The intentional connection between the classroom teacher and the family was a tactic

reported by two of the first grade teachers whose family population were largely migrant

workers. These participants indicated that this strategy was a crucial element of developing

student success. Both Christina and Alicia said that they have families who speak dialects other

than Spanish or English, as they have recently arrived in the United States from different regions

of Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador. Both teachers maintained that each family wants what is

best for their child and emphasized that educating the families is crucial. Even though this

endeavor is time consuming, it pays dividends in the end. These teachers clearly went above and

beyond the typical expectations to ensure parents were kept abreast of their children's progress.

The teachers provided the families with information on accessing community resources, such as

the library, so that their children had a quiet place to study. Christina stated, "Make sure you are

aware of their culture. Get to know who you are teaching and learn about their culture."

Similarly, Alicia offered:

Family interaction and contact is very important. From the beginning of the year we

cover expectations, there are constant informal contacts. I send notes home and also

communicate via an audio recording for illiterate parents. Parents are constantly kept

abreast of progress. We bring families on field trips and include them in our activities.

Juvenile justice system workers and counselors. Students face various hurdles and

influences that affect their educational experience. Each counselor and member of the juvenile

justice system interviewed indicated that the student's environment plays a significant role in

their entrance into the juvenile system. William, a criminal defense attorney with over 17 years of experience representing juveniles in the Central Coast County, who has an intimate knowledge of their crimes, life histories and personal experiences, said that many students become gang affiliated simply as a result of where they happen to live. He stated that the gang influence was so prevalent in certain neighborhoods that the environmental component is significant, and the affiliation is a natural occurrence of living in a well-known gang neighborhood. William asserted, "In this county it's family ties. Their identity is tied to their neighborhood. The neighborhood identifies you. Your address becomes your identity."

In addition to the constant presence of gang activity and the violence that is associated with it, the stress of marginalization and poverty can create barriers for students before, during, and after school. For instance, Michelle, a Central Coast County social worker with extensive experience working system-involved adolescents, maintained that being economically disadvantaged can have a profound impact.

> Worrying about food is enormously stressful. Possibly getting evicted makes the earth they walk on unstable. I have heard over and over again how young people walking through unsafe areas to and from school passed gang members who offered to make sure they got to school safely, offered to buy them new shoes, gave them money for lunch, etc.

> Poverty, violence, fear of personal harm, and the socialization that occurs in a

marginalized neighborhood inhibit a child's healthy development (Conchas & Vigil, 2012). Unfortunately, the educational system cannot control where a child is raised. The need for early intervention is critical; this was the most frequent response given by all participants who were interviewed.

Interventions

Timely interventions should be made in early childhood, as learning difficulties are noticed and incidents of misbehavior become evident. These interventions should be preventative in nature because they may help deter an individual from becoming involved with delinquency and gangs (Howell & Egley, 2005; Sprague & Walker, 2000). The need for interventions materialized across all three interview groups as being a necessary aspect of maintaining school engagement or a strategy for deterring entrance into the juvenile justice system. Interviewees made reference to two types of interventions: academic and behavioral. Many of the young men who were interviewed by this researcher and the subjects interviewed in the two studies included in the document analysis commented that they either struggled academically, were identified as special education students, or simply couldn't focus while in class. Their statements made regarding academic struggles, with little or no additional assistance from educators, indicates the possible lack of interventions. Educators interviewed believed that academic interventions, along with the effective analysis of data were essential components of diagnosing academic difficulties and implementing the proper intervention. The educators cited positive relationships and positive behavior interventions for misbehavior as approaches to redirect students who are misbehaving in class. Juvenile justice system members and counselors focused on interventions in the areas of behavior, dysfunctional home lives, and early delinquency. Interventions in various forms and in regard to divergent aspects of a child's life were identified as a crucial element in increasing engagement and potentially reducing further delinquency.

Student experiences. Learning difficulties and other impairments that went unaddressed or were misdiagnosed were commonly reported occurrences for the young men who provided

accounts of their educational experiences. Adult correctional facilities have a remarkable number of inmates who are identified as having learning differences or requiring special education services. Bronson, Maruschak, and Berzofsky (2015) asserted that nearly 50% of the United States prison population suffers from some form of a disability. The number of incarcerated men who have not been identified with having a disability is unknown; however, given that approximately 68% of the inmate population is high school dropouts, the number of men who would have benefited from interventions in elementary school and beyond could be much higher (Thornburgh, 2006). The men interviewed in this study, as well as in the studies conducted by Alvarado (2015) and Garcia (2013), reported having difficulty maintaining attention in class, experiencing academic struggles, and being labeled as academically incapable. According to the account provided by Alvarado (2015), Henry had difficulty maintaining the ability to pay attention in class.

> I was getting into trouble a lot by the teachers. I couldn't focus. I was talking a lot to my friends. At the time I thought I was just like, hyper all the time. And my mom would say to like, to chill, and stop messing around. That's like, how I am like, still today. I am all over, here, over there, all over. (p. 63)

Ernie (as cited in Alvarado, 2015) described an experience where his inability to focus or pay attention to the satisfaction of his teachers caused him to be excluded from class.

> In school I had a hard time reading and writing. And having to wake up every morning and be just sitting there staring like "what's really going on?" It's kinda like, sad. And not getting the material in school. Teachers were sending me next door when I didn't do my work, but it was 'cause I couldn't figure it out or I was too slow. So, next door, and like I just be sitting there and then going to sleep-all by myself. (p. 32)

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Armando recalls being a "good student" through second grade and enjoying the academic component of school; however, in third grade, mathematics caused him to struggle. He said he didn't get any help through the school or at home. He stated that he began to "copy" his classmates in order to get through school. As Armando recounted his elementary school experience, this undetected learning block appeared to coincide with his behavioral issues and disengagement from school. The interventions that might have helped Armando and Henry did not appear to have been implemented. Although, as many men who stated they had unaddressed learning differences, there were those who felt they were not only academically capable in elementary school, but that they performed very well. It seems that the unaddressed needs or lack of effective interventions could be a factor in a student's elementary experience being unpleasant or disengaging.

Educators. First grade elementary school teachers and school administrators identified a need for academic and behavioral interventions. Their response to increasing engagement focused on positive relationships, building community, and academic engagement. Interventions for behavior-related incidents were based on the premise that positive interventions are more effective than punitive ones. As Javier, a veteran educator, principal, and assistant superintendent, commented: "You must consider the greater good. Punitive punishment doesn't always work. Another idea is to give difficult students leadership roles and turn them from the class clown into the class leader."

Alan, an elementary school principal, suggested a multi-faceted approach that was based in positivity, family communication, and restorative justice.

It starts with positive relationships. There are effective practices and approaches such as 5:1 positive narration, consistent family communication, incorporating student interest

into the curriculum, student-led leadership opportunities, Morning Meetings and Restorative Justice practices all make a difference - but I look to emphasize a foundation of positive relationships for our staff and students, especially those who exhibit behavior challenges.

A common theme among the educators is that consequences should be designed to teach the proper behavior and social skills. The re-teaching is an intervention strategy that is not exclusionary, but helps students build regulation skills and fosters prosocial behavior. For example, first grade teacher Jennifer stated,

> I use a Zen Zone. It allows students to reflect and calm down. It's done very near the teaching environment so that it's not exclusionary. I also have lunch meetings with small groups to talk about their behavior. I believe that consequences are designed to teach or re-teach behavior. Teach them how to problem solve and identify their dysregulation. Teach them how to repair the relationships.

Additionally, master teacher Noelle, with 38 years of experience, stated:

> Build a community within a community. It's important to build the students self-esteem and provide a sense of well-being. There has to be a feeling of belonging. You become part of a tiny community where everyone is on an equal playing field. They won't learn until they feel safe and loved. Give them leadership skills and teach them to respect each other. A huge part is acceptance.

Juvenile justice system workers and counselors. Interventions that occurred after a youth had become involved with the juvenile justice system were believed to be too late. To be most effective, administering interventions prior to middle school was the consensus of the counselors and juvenile justice system workers. With the exception of one of the juvenile justice

system workers and counselors interviewed, no one could identify any effective gang prevention programs or strategies that they had encountered. Both the retired judge and current defense attorney maintained that they had not observed or encountered an effective gang prevention program. Richard, a retired 27-year veteran of the Central Coast County probation department, felt that there were effective programs for deterring or addressing gang affiliation once a youth had become involved in the criminal justice system; however, he felt strongly that earlier interventions should be implemented long before the youth has entered the juvenile justice system. He stated,

> I have observed effective programs, strategies, and interventions that have had an impact on the reduction of gang violence. However, in my opinion, these programs were at the wrong end of the rehabilitation continuum. It addresses the later stages of criminal behavior, when it has become a serious/dangerous societal problem. Rather at the initial contact stage of a juvenile's delinquent behavior spectrum. I believe the crucial age of intervention should be before the minor enters the juvenile courts. I have seen this as early as 8 years old.

Michelle, a veteran social worker of Central Coast County who has worked extensively with incarcerated juveniles and those who were gang affiliated, did not concur with Richard. She commented:

> To this day, I have yet to see a consistent program that targets reduction of gang violence. What I have seen is individuals who work closely with at risk youth but once those individuals move to a different place, the progress is gone with them.

> It is critical to conduct interventions prior to a student entering middle school. As many of the young men commented, they began their affiliation with the gang between the ages of 12-

13 years. According to Eccles and Midgley (1989) children can experience significant social-emotional, physical, and familial relationship issues during the time when they are beginning to transition from elementary school to middle school. Essentially, there was consensus among the counselors and juvenile justice system workers that middle school is when the overt risk for gang affiliation becomes apparent.

Belonging

Most children naturally want to maintain a sense of belonging to a particular group. Maslow (1943) asserted that social bonding with peers is a natural process in the maturation process of adolescents. Consequently, when children do not find a healthy manner in which to belong to a group, it can lead impressionable youth who are approaching adolescence to seek out environments or peers that will accept them and give them a sense of purpose and belonging. For some students it is better to belong to any group than to no group at all. As preadolescents desperately search for acceptance and belonging, the gang lifestyle can fill that much-desired void if teachers lack the ability to promote a sense of belonging (Beck & Malley, 1998).

Student experiences. Several of the young men reported being assimilated into the gang lifestyle during early adolescence. For some, this process appeared to be a natural progression from school disengagement to associating with groups of teens who were already gang affiliated. For others, it was a means of survival or protection due to the environment they were struggling to navigate. However, many described a profound sense of alienation that they experienced in elementary school. The angst of being humiliated, excluded, or misunderstood by their teachers was clearly unforgettable, wielding a strong influence on their sense of belonging within the school setting. However, several recounted a story of one caring teacher who made a lasting impression due to their kindness, compassion, and willingness to take extra time to help them.

Manny related that there was one teacher who stood out from the rest. He felt she was fair and "cared about us." Armando had a similar experience with his fourth grade teacher how whom he spoke fondly. He shared how this teacher took the class on a field trip to a university, which he described as "so memorable." Armando said he felt a connection to this teacher because his teacher's father had been an agricultural worker, just as Armando's parents had been. Conversely, Armando and Manny both recalled one particular teacher at their respective elementary schools who did not treat them well and caused them to not want to be in the teacher's class. Armando admitted his behavior was not good in this teacher's class; however, he related that he would skip class and go to the library where he would help the librarians sort books.

Armando said he was beginning to act up in sixth grade, which was a pivotal time for him. He began to get sent out of class frequently, along with a classmate who he described and having ADHD. He commented that the teacher would send out his friend, so he would act up along with his friend. He felt that the teacher singled his friend out and didn't know how to deal with his disability adequately. Armando said that this particular teacher was the one who he felt was the most negative teacher he had encountered, asserting that his fourth grade teacher had much more positive strategies to manage his students. During this period of time, he began to admire the kids who wore certain "colors" and listened to specific types of music. Armando did not say anything specifically about gang affiliation, and for his own protection and self-incrimination could not; however, this researcher believes he was alluding to students who were displaying the colors of one of the two gangs that were known to occupy his neighborhood.

Within marginalized communities, children become street socialized, and one's position within the hierarchy of the streets becomes evident as part of that socialization (Conchas & Vigil,

2012). Respect has a different connotation within the context of navigating this environment. For many of the young men, gaining respect is paramount and coveted. This form of respect can provide a person with status within their community and ward off the possibility of being attacked or victimized. Manny recounted being "disrespected" in middle school, leading him to fight his peers and become suspended for these actions; however, in Manny's traversing of the blurred lines of his neighborhood customs and the rules of the school, he chose maintaining respect over following the school's expectations.

For some individuals, belonging could mean being a part of a group that can provide not only social acceptance, but also protection. In the event that one cannot adequately defend oneself, becoming a target for attack or bullying, the gang can serve as a protective barrier. As Richard recalled:

I started to get bullied in 7th grade. I hated it. So, I turned to the homies to get that protection I needed. I knew it was a status thing too. Then, by that time, I didn't have no time for school. I was too busy .(Alvarado, 2015, p. 57)

For Berto, he found "love" that seemed to elude him in his own family or within his social circle. Becoming affiliated with the gang offered the sense of belonging that he was craving. "When I got in the gang, I wanted, you know?" (Alvarado, 2015, p. 66).

In the case of Daniel, his motivation for affiliation with the gang was the "respect" that he would receive within his neighborhood. His role models were family members who were affiliated with the gang. "I looked up to my uncles, they were gang members. They were like, men of respect" (Alvarado, 2015, p. 71).

Respect and protection are common reasons for the expressed desire to become gang affiliated. However, the overarching need for belonging was an additional theme woven into the statements of many of the young men interviewed.

Educators. School teachers and administrators recognized the significance of building a culture that was inclusive. They espoused the importance of developing a caring environment where students feel safe and secure. For example, master teacher Noelle stated,

> Build a community within a community. It's important to build the students' self-esteem and provide a sense of well-being. There has to be a feeling of belonging. You become part of a tiny community where everyone is on an equal playing field. They won't learn until they feel safe and loved. Give them leadership skills and teach them to respect each other. A huge part is acceptance.

Within the school setting, the culture of the school and within the classroom has a considerable effect on a student's overall sense of inclusiveness and feeling that he/she is part of a community. For example, elementary school principal Ben stated, "When students think back to their teachers, they generally think first about how much those teachers helped the students feel welcome, wanted, and special." Zoe, a first grade teacher echoed this sentiment: "Classroom environment has to be positive. Kids have to feel safe and cared for. Test scores will improve if the social emotional needs are met."

Creating a culture that causes students to feel connected to the school is vital; however, there are other factors that affect the sense of belonging. Within the overall framework of creating a positive culture where belonging and connectedness can occur, positive relationships, caring personnel, and a sense of "community" were themes that continued to surface.

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Juvenile justice system workers and counselors. The two counselors identified the need for belonging as a reason for seeking affiliation with a gang; however, the juvenile justice system workers identified the environment as an extremely significant aspect of why youth may decide to affiliate with a gang and did not identify belonging as a basis for affiliation. Nina, a school counselor and someone who is familiar with the motivating factors for gang affiliation, commented: "Parental attention, lack of love at home…schools can take the place of that. If the school is not able to provide the student with what is missing at home, then they will go and find it somewhere else."

Michelle, a Central Coast County social worker who works extensively with probationers and gang affiliated youth believed that belonging in the form of school connectedness could be a helpful prevention strategy. She stated,

> The degree to which a child can feel connected to school, to view teachers as helping adults, and to feel as though they are liked and valued by their peers can definitely improve outcomes overall, not only related to gang associated youth.

An adolescent's desire to feel connected to a group is an influential factor in their juvenile trajectory. As evidenced in the statements from the young men, the choice to seek belonging occurred for various reasons and may have been swayed by the various challenges they faced within their communities.

Caring Adult

A recurring theme that was revealed in the analysis of the responses was the significance of an adult who could foster a positive relationship, exhibit trustworthy characteristics, and exude a high level of compassion. These elements were synthesized in the theme of a *caring adult.* Across the groups interviewed, the importance of having a person in the young men's lives

became quite evident. The absence of a father, either physically or emotionally, was prevalent in many of the accounts of lived experiences. The young men shared fond memories of adults who exhibited high levels of care for them, and many respondents reported needed some feeling of care that was imparted by the affiliation with a gang. Many of the counseling and juvenile justice workers felt that the young men sought out someone who showed them a feeling of being loved or cared about, since this was an element that was lacking in their childhood. The concept of having someone who could guide and counsel them materialized in the analysis.

Student experiences. Manny and Armando recalled a specific teacher whom they identified as caring and trustworthy. Armando felt that his fourth grade teacher was someone who truly cared for the students and made a sincere effort to expose them to experiences that children from his neighborhood would not otherwise have had. He said that this particular teacher took the class on a field trip to a local university and this was one of his best memories. Manny described a teacher he had for 3 years during elementary school as someone who stood out for him. He recounted fond memories of how she treated her students: "She rewarded us. She was fair. She cared about us." Gustavo recalled the concern his counselor in junior high showed for him.

> My counselor in junior high, um, she was real nice. She knew my brother and my cousin 'cause they went to the same school before me. She used to try to help me out like, check on me in class. Not that many other people would reach out to me (Alvarado, 2015, p.73)

> Eddie told Garcia (2013) that he had a very loving second grade teacher, who "seemed to care too much" (p. 223). He recalled her as being "just loving to everybody" (p.223), describing her as able to demonstrate a feeling of comfort at the other teachers couldn't replicate. Fond

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memories of elementary teachers were recounted in many of the lived experiences. The warm and nurturing relationships seemed to be extremely positive experiences for the young men.

Another example of the caring nature that was exhibited by a second grade teacher was detailed by Shorty in an account to Alvarado (2015):

> In second grade I had a cool teacher. It was me and my buddy Armando. He passed away already but she would be cool with us. Like, she went to our flag football games and took us out to eat. Like, I was held back and she would spend time to try to help me with my school-work. Yeah, I guess everyone else was like "fuck it." They don't care. She would tell us to come early to school and she'd feed us MacDonald's before school. If she wasn't there that day, Armando and I be like,…we ain't going to school then (p. 66)

In their lived experiences, some of the young men spoke about the absence of a caring adult. The caring adults who may have been present in their lives often came in the form of a teacher; this relationship was not sustained as they matured. Outside of the school setting, participants did not mention any other mentors or trusted adults from whom they could seek advice. These young men simply did not have caring, constant adult figures in their lives. Unfortunately, the absence of having a person who had their best interest and kept encouraging them appeared to be a common phenomenon in their childhood development.

Educators. Participants in the educational field expressed the need for positive and caring relationships. A common descriptor for a caring adult was the mention of *positive relationship*. Lydia commented on her experience with gang affiliated youth and the influence a caring relationship with an adult can yield:

> For the most part, the kids I have dealt with have family ties (Gangs) but when they come to school, they form relationships with adults that help them think twice before getting in

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deeper or making worse mistakes. If they don't have these relationships, all they have is their "friends" who are not always the best influences.

First grade teachers attested to the importance of maintaining positive relationships with their students as a necessary component of building a culture that enhances the feeling of connectedness. Jennifer stated succinctly, "Kids need to know they are cared about. Build a culture that is caring."

School administrators noted the value of creating emotional connections before learning can occur. Both teachers and administrators endorsed the significance of positive reinforcement throughout the day. Educators emphasized the value of utilizing constant praise, reinforcement, and encouragement, as opposed to critical or exclusionary language, as crucial in maintaining an environment conducive to learning. The need to be empathic and caring within the school setting was reinforced by Ben, an elementary school principal:

> Teachers also need to ensure strong relationships are built before instruction takes place, and during instruction, teachers need to use positive reinforcement and coaching to help students see themselves as capable, have a growth mindset, and feel like they belong to the classroom community.

Juvenile justice system members and counselors. The desire for adolescents to feel cared about can be intertwined with the need for belonging. These needs may cause adolescents to fill the void of a caring adult with the sense of belonging a group provides. *Belonging* is an important social-emotional element; however, the benefit of having a caring adult is vital. The caring adult can represent stability, someone on whom one can rely in times of need. Day to day interactions with adults are necessary; however, having a stable and reliable person to turn to was believed to be an integral part of traversing the difficult paths that many of the young men in

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marginalized communities are forced to endure. Both counselors Nina and Michele commented on the necessity of a caring adult. Nina stated, "Having someone you can rely on is important...a caring adult in your life. Having someone you trust and able to confide is very important." Michelle said, "These kids find acceptance within their peer group rather than with adults. It takes a very committed adult to identify these needs but often times by the time they reach high school age, their gang involvement is high."

Robert, a retired Judge, asserted that adolescents require a "safe place to learn.'' He felt strongly that the young men he has encountered in the courtroom could have benefited immensely by having "mentors and caring adults to show them a better way." As such, the respondents agreed that adults who are supportive and understanding can make a difference in a child's life trajectory.

Self-Worth

The four preceding themes—*environment, interventions, belonging,* and *caring adults*— have a distinct influence on a child and how their self-worth is developed. The three groups of respondents raised different perspectives based on their position or occupation. Their viewpoint on how self-worth, self-esteem, or attempting to raise one's self worth, could affect a young man's trajectory towards avoiding or affiliating with criminal activity and the gang life, were intertwined. Self-worth was a theme that emerged from the accounts in the participants' lived experiences and from the responses of the educators, juvenile justice workers, and counselors. Self-worth was rooted in the preceding themes; for many of the young men, there was a lack of optimism which appeared to shape their existence. Therefore, *self-worth* was the last theme identified in the findings.

Student experiences. Many of the accounts of the young men interviewed made mention of dysfunctional home lives, neighborhoods that were affected by violence and drug use, and educational experiences that were oftentimes hindered by learning difficulties. These cumulative experiences shaped their self-worth, which, for many, resulted in the need to disengage from the educational setting and seek solace in the accepting environment of the gang life. Many of the respondents acknowledged the importance of how self-worth is either developed or thwarted. In Alvarado's (2015) study, Ernie commented on his feeling of inadequacy in school that potentially led to his disengagement:

> I was in those special education classes. My mom would get mad at me, like I wasn't smart or something. I'd get yelled at for not trying and stuff. When things just started to get hard, I just thought school was over my head (p. 63)

The absence of consistently positive and caring role models from whom the young men could receive affirmation resulted in feelings of hopelessness. As Ricky described to Alvarado (2015):

> When I look back, like, I never told myself like I want to be like a fireman or something one day. Like I never had that. I mean, I had dreams and stuff. Like, I would say I want to go there one day or I want that one-day. But like, I never said I want to be that one-day. Like that, no. I just didn't have that. I never had dreams. Like I never had that growing up (p. 74)

As noted by Garcia (2013), interviewee Eddie offered a suggestion for those working with incarcerated and formerly gang involved men; "They need to know that a lot of us come from broken-down families, being in poverty, being neglected, having low self-esteem, feeling like there's no other way" (p. 320). This suggestion provides insight into how the environment and the need for caring adults manifest in the form of low levels of self-esteem and worth.

Educators. Developing a student's self-worth or self-esteem was recognized as an important aspect of building connections to the school setting and preparing students to be able to receive academic instruction. Strategies to increase self-worth were often described in the realm of having positive relationships and building a sense of community. The sense of belonging would foster feelings of safety and wellbeing. Thirty-eight year veteran teacher Noelle commented:

> It is important to build the students self-esteem and provide a sense of well-being. There has to be a feeling of belonging. You become part of a tiny community where everyone is on an equal playing field. They won't learn until they feel safe and loved. Give them leadership skills and teach them to respect each other. A huge part is acceptance.

The educators advocated for teaching students strategies to control emotions or respond to adversity in a manner that will not cause escalation; the teachers were not inclined to utilize exclusionary discipline tactics, but would rather use the opportunity to teach the student pro-social emotional skills. As a first grade teacher, Jennifer maintained, "consequences are designed to teach or re-teach behavior." She preferred to educate the students on how to "problem solve and identify their dysregulation." Jennifer would rather the students learn how to repair the relationship. The concept of teaching, rather than shaming, arose as a response to misbehavior that was designed to build capacity and self-worth. Jennifer commented that it becomes a problem when kids get labeled the "bad kids." She said that once that children are labeled, "they begin to feel bad and it is a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Understanding the students and taking the time to get to know them on a deeper level were approaches that the educators felt were crucial when building relationships, which in turn could increase self-worth. Zoe, a first grade teacher, stated that she took the time to find out

about the children's interests so she could understand them better and leverage that information to develop a stronger relationship. Javier, an assistant superintendent, believed that it was essential to "understand the home context and to ask students to meet the expectations based on where they are at." He felt strongly that if educators knew the challenges that many of the students face within their home and neighborhood, they could improve their personal interactions with their students. The theme of positive and personal relationship building recurred frequently in the educators' responses. The rationale for building the relationship was to increase the students' self-worth and esteem, which would lay the groundwork for increased engagement.

Juvenile justice system workers and counselors. Many of the counselors and juvenile justice system members have encountered young men who have fallen into the gang lifestyle or become involved in the criminal justice system once they are adolescents. These adult's perspective on how low self-esteem has affected their trajectory was formed after meeting the individual at some point after they have left elementary school. Too often, the impact of their need to belong and low self-worth had already taken its toll. This group's responses were based on having already observed the negative outcome.

William, a criminal defense attorney, believed that school could offer a preventative component to reducing gang involvement if the juveniles were able to feel successful in the educational setting as this experience could be connected to improving self-esteem. Nina, an elementary school counselor, offered a similar sentiment, believing that if students were struggling academically, they would feel "dumb." Michelle offered suggestions for helping children feel valued, emphasizing that it is important to find unique qualities about a student that could be used to build their self-worth.

Find something to genuinely like and value in each kid, and make sure they are able to

sense your positive regard. Smile at them, engage with them, reinforce their special

skills, whatever they are. Young children thrive with positive reinforcement and

knowing that someone truly sees their value and believes in their purpose can make it.

Richard, a retired probation officer, remarked that the education system could have an influence

a student's self-perception if he/she were able to take a holistic view of the child to determine

their strengths and leverage that assessment to motivate the child. He stated, "The education

system can identify a child's positive attributes and even talents and encourage them toward a

positive direction."

Respondents from the juvenile justice system members and counselors maintained that

the educational experience could affect a child's self-worth if the experience was positive. Thus,

finding an approach that would allow for identifying students' unique strengths and connecting

those attributes to building self-worth within the school culture would be beneficial.

Observations

Observations of the participant teachers' classrooms were conducted to provide context

and allow for increased awareness by the researcher prior to the interviews. The observations the

triangulation process. Through an evaluative perspective and a lens focused on social justice,

notetaking within the classroom environment afforded the researcher insight into the various

classroom management strategies, modes of communication with the students, and the classroom

culture. The observations were examined and taken into account when interviewing teachers.

Notemaking for clarification and a deeper understanding of the culture within the classrooms

when the interviews were conducted.

The observations were conducted in two first grade classrooms at one elementary school in the East Side Elementary School District and within three classrooms at two different elementary schools in the Seabreeze Unified School District. The Seabreeze Unified School District serves four cities and a portion of the unincorporated area of the Central Coast County; however, the elementary schools that were chosen were situated in one city where these elementary sites serve a student body that is predominantly Hispanic and whose families are significantly economically disadvantaged. Each teacher and her students were observed on two separate occasions for a duration of approximately 60 minutes. All of the schools were located in areas that have experienced gang violence and were in close proximity to housing projects. Each classroom had approximately 20 students. Of the nearly 100 students that were observed, it appeared that the population was in excess of 97% Hispanic. Of the five teachers, two were Latina and three were White. All of the teachers were female. There were commonalities among all of the teachers, yet each teacher brought a unique style and approach. The range of experience for five teachers ranged from a new teacher in her first year to a teacher with 24 years of experience.

Chapter Summary

Five themes—*environment, interventions, belonging, caring adults,* and *self worth*—surfaced from the interviews, document analysis, and observations, all of which were guided by the overarching research question that sought to determine what influence or impact school disengagement have on a student's entrance into the STPP. Within the overarching question, four sub-questions emanated as a result of the literature review:

1. What are educators' beliefs regarding best practices for culturally relevant classroom management and pedagogy in schools located in marginalized regions of Central Coast County?

2. To what extent might the classroom culture, relationships, and classroom management strategies employed by teachers affect student engagement?

3. How do currently or formerly incarcerated Latino males who claim affiliation with gangs or have been identified by the criminal justice systems as a gang member perceive the effect, if any, that their pre-kindergarten through sixth grade educational experiences had on their affiliation with a criminal street gang or entrance into the criminal justice system?

4. What do various individuals who work within the juvenile justice system, social workers, school counselors, believe are the significant causes or factors, if any, that lead a juvenile to become involved with a criminal street gang?

The three groups of respondents were asked a unique set of questions that elicited different perspectives based on their position or occupation. The three groups of participants who were interviewed as part of this research were individuals who are either incarcerated or were formerly incarcerated and have been identified as being gang affiliated, elementary school teachers, educational administrators, and members of the juvenile justice system. A social worker and school counselor were included in the group identified as juvenile justice system workers, because one counselor worked specifically with juvenile probationers in her role as a social worker. The school counselor works specifically with students and their families, addressing emotional issues, behavioral difficulties, and parenting support. Included in the analysis of lived experiences were accounts of 19 formerly incarcerated Latino male gang

members who resided in Southern California during their childhood. Specifically, the researcher examined their lived experiences, which included their elementary school experiences. These accounts were provided to two separate researchers as part of their dissertations. Their accounts were analyzed via the method of document analysis.

Environment emerged as a theme since respondents from all groups identified the impact of the environment, specifically the neighborhood influence, the child's home life, and the influence of gangs and violence. Both teachers and administrators acknowledged that their students faced tremendous challenges within their neighborhoods and homes. They sought out strategies to minimize those barriers and were aware of the value of forging strong lines of communication and relationships with the families. Juvenile justice system workers identified the significance of living in poverty and the inherent pressure of gangs based on the neighborhood in which a child may reside. The men who conveyed their lived experiences echoed the impact of the environment in shaping their perceptions of how they were valued, the need to navigate customs and norms that were unique to lower income areas, and how this detracted from a positive school experience.

Interventions surfaced as a theme throughout the interviews and document analysis. The need for interventions materialized across all three interview groups as being a necessary component of maintaining school engagement or a strategy for deterring entrance into the juvenile justice system. Many of the men who were interviewed by this researcher and the subjects interviewed in the two studies included in the document analysis commented that they struggled academically, were identified as requiring special education services, or had difficulty paying attention while in class. Educators cited the use of positive relationships and positive behavior interventions as approaches for redirecting students when they were misbehaving in

class. Juvenile justice system members and counselors focused on interventions in the areas of behavior, dysfunctional home life, and early delinquency. Interventions in various forms and in regard to divergent aspects of a child's life were identified as a crucial element in increasing engagement and reducing further delinquency.

Belonging materialized as a theme to which many of the young men alluded as they noted the need to seek affirmation and belonging from their peers and older males in their neighborhood. In their lived experiences, many of the young men mentioned absent fathers or ones fathers were negative role models. Although some recounted a positive relationship with a particular educator, those relationships were not sustained, nor was a strong connection to the scholastic institution achieved. Educators noted that it is necessary to forge relationships with students to create a sense of community and attachment to the school; however, if the student was unable to establish the bond with a teacher, he was apt to find it elsewhere.

A recurring theme that was revealed in the analysis of the responses was the significance of an adult who could have a foster a positive relationship, exhibit trustworthy characteristics, and exude a high level of compassion. The overlapping elements of the theme of belonging were evident in the elements synthesized within the theme of caring adult. Across the groups interviewed, the importance of having a person in the young men's lives became quite evident. The absence of a father, either physically or emotionally, was prevalent in many of the accounts of lived experiences. The young men shared fond memories of adults who exhibited high levels of care, and many respondents described feeling of being cared for that was imparted by the affiliation with a gang. Many of the counseling and juvenile justice workers felt that the young men sought out someone who showed them a feeling of being loved or cared about, since this

was an element that lacked in their childhood. The notion of having someone who could guide

and counsel them also materialized in the analysis.

The final theme that was identified was determined by analyzing connection between the

viewpoints on how self-worth, self-esteem, or attempting to raise one's self worth, could

influence or affect a young man's trajectory towards avoiding or affiliating with criminal activity

and the gang life were intertwined. Self-worth was a theme that emerged from the accounts in

the lived experiences and from the responses of the educators, juvenile justice workers, and

counselors. Self-worth was rooted in the preceding themes; for many of the young men, their

personal perceptions that lacked optimism appeared to shape their existence. Therefore, it was

listed as the last of the five themes in which to describe the findings. The final chapter will

compare the findings of the study and themes discovered within the literature and identify the

conclusions and potential implications of the study, which will inform the recommendations for

potential changes in policy, practice, strategies, interventions, and research.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings that were obtained through interviews with educators, juvenile justice system workers, counselors, and Latino males who are incarcerated or have been previously incarcerated and have been identified as members of one of the two major Mexican prison gangs in California. Previously recorded, lived accounts of gang affiliated Latino males who resided in Southern California were also analyzed. Observations were conducted in classrooms of the teachers who were interviewed in this study to allow for deeper understanding and insight into their responses. The observation informed the triangulation process. Following the discussion of the findings, conclusions were formulated, and the rationale supporting these conclusions was stated. Recommendations for changes in policy, practice, and research were made.

Introduction

This study examined the potential factors that contribute to the STPP through a critical ethnographic methodology and a critical theory framework. The intention of this study was to offer a position for analysis that considered the relationship between sociological factors that intertwine with current educational practices and philosophies in public schools. The researcher examined current teaching practices and educational policies that serve youth who are socialized in geographical areas that are marginalized, predominantly Latino, and prone to gang violence in a Central California County. The unique aspect of this research is the significant and continuous level of Latino youth gang violence that continues to occur in this region and has drawn national attention. This study explored the role that the educational system might play in reducing youth gang affiliation and decreasing the chance of entrance into the juvenile justice system as a result

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of this affiliation. The researcher posits that entrance into the juvenile justice system is the catalyst that appreciably increases a youth's chances of adult incarceration, harm, or both, thereby reducing the chance at equitable post-secondary educational opportunities, future employment, and societal acceptance. Pre-adolescent educational experiences were examined as a means to identify the contributing circumstances that in turn could reduce gang affiliation. This study sought to identify proactive methods that may diminish violence, entry into the juvenile justice system, and potential adult incarceration.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that guided this study was as follows: What role, if any, does school disengagement have on a student's entrance into the school to prison pipeline?

Several sub-questions arose during a review of the literature:

1. What are educators' beliefs regarding best practices for culturally relevant classroom management and pedagogy in schools located in marginalized regions of Central Coast County?

2. To what extent might the classroom culture, relationships, and classroom management strategies employed by teachers affect student engagement?

3. How do currently or formerly incarcerated Latino males who claim affiliation with gangs or have been identified by the criminal justice systems as a gang member perceive the effect, if any, that their pre-kindergarten through sixth grade educational experiences had on their affiliation with a criminal street gang or entrance into the criminal justice system?

4. What do various individuals who work within the juvenile justice system, social

workers, and school counselors, believe are the significant causes or factors, if any,

that lead a juvenile to become involved with a criminal street gang?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate what influence or impact, if any, a student's

educational experience prior to entering middle school may have on their desire to affiliate,

associate, or otherwise become involved with the gang culture, via the analysis of interviews of

lived educational experiences of formerly incarcerated males who currently or have formerly

affiliated with gangs. The researcher conducted interviews with elementary teachers, school

counselors, school administrators, probation officers, social workers, and members of the judicial

system. The objective of this study was to bring to light emergent interventions, practices, and

policies by K-6 educational institutions that may improve engagement and reduce school

disengagement in order to maximize the influence the teacher and school setting can have on the

reduction of gang affiliation and the incarceration of juveniles.

Discussion of Key Findings

Five key themes emanated from this study as a result of the interviews conducted among

three interrelated, but distinct groups of participants, which were summarized as follows:

- F-1: The influence of the bioecological environment on children is remarkable. The

environment determines how they negotiate their home lives, neighborhood, school, and

relationships. The geographic location where a person is raised is consequential because

it is not a choice and is oftentimes a result of their family's economic status.

- F-2: It is critical to implement effective and timely interventions that can address learning

differences, problematic behaviors, and social and emotional issues.

- F-3: A sense of school connectedness and belonging should be initiated and sustained throughout a student's school experience.

- F-4: The young men who became gang affiliated frequently lacked caring adults who served as positive role models in their lives. Because most of these men had absent fathers, they sought out acceptance from older youth within their neighborhood, thereby becoming street socialized and gang involved. Mentors and educators could show the young men compassion, empathy, and positive attention; such relationships that may mitigate the absence of a male role model within the home.

- F-5: Positive self-worth, or lack thereof, emerged as a noteworthy theme from the men's perspective. Self-worth was not specifically alluded to, but rather was an intertwined element that resonated throughout the accounts of the lived experiences.

As the preceding themes were analyzed and synthesized, one clear component rose to the surface; The environment and experiences of these men caused them to feel compelled to fill a void. This need was met through peer affirmation, status within an accepting group, and purpose as a result of being part of something where they felt they could be a contributing member. Each of these elements will be analyzed individually.

Environment. Within this study, it was determined that a child's environment has the potential to have a profound influence on one's life trajectory. These factors were described through different paradigms depending upon the participants' personal experiences. Several of the young men recounted their exposure to violence and their families' economic struggles as having an effect on the people with whom they chose to socialize and how they were able to perform in school. Their environment became an immediate barrier that could potentially affect how they would progress through school, as it caused various stressors that children from more

affluent neighborhoods would not have to endure. For instance, simply getting to school could be problematic due to the likely possibility of being bullied, threatened, or being challenged to fight. Gangs and violence were commonplace in these young men's neighborhoods. The manner in which they responded to being bullied or challenged had unique consequences that could dictate future treatment or their reputation. As such, they may require protection from others. As these young men bonded for protection, they valued the loyalty and camaraderie that the reciprocal protection offered. Knowing that someone "has your back" can create a powerful bond as a youth enters adolescence in a neighborhood where personal safety is often at stake.

Members of the juvenile justice system and counselors maintained that the impact of residing in an impoverished neighborhood could be a significant contributing factor for becoming involved in juvenile delinquency and gang affiliation. Dysfunctional home lives where domestic violence was mentioned frequently, along with substance abuse, only exacerbated conditions that were already worsened due to economic resources. As one counselor indicated, not having the basic necessities can be a hindrance to concentrating in school and becoming engaged in the educational system. A juvenile defense attorney asserted that a student's neighborhood could become his identity. He elaborated further that some neighborhoods carried identifying names that were associated with a particular gang and could automatically create an expectation that the youth represent and defend the gang. This notion was supported by one educator who had been raised in this environment herself; she maintained that gang affiliation was often generational, and the cycle can be difficult to disrupt. Educators suggested that understanding the environment in which the students were coming from was vital. Most emphasized the importance of cultural awareness, family communication, and having the ability to understand the challenges that students from underserved communities may often

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endure. For instance, one teacher commented that she has 20 students in her class and within that group all are Hispanic; however, there are five different dialects spoken, and most of her students' parents cannot read, write, nor speak basic Spanish. To add to the challenges that families face, many live in crowded conditions with two to three families in one apartment. She reiterated the need to make concerted efforts to meet with the parents, educate them on how their child can be successful, and provide them with alternate strategies to support their child despite the burdensome circumstances that they face.

Vigil (2002) developed a multiple marginality framework that addresses the numerous factors that can affect a young Mexican male who is residing in a marginalized community. Unlike Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological theory, this theory takes into account the pressures within the ecological, economic, and sociocultural system that are encountered by underserved youth on a daily basis. Multiple marginality theory incorporates issues such as racism, social and cultural repression, and the social psychological factors that can contribute to a youth of Mexican descent's decision to seek attention and belonging through the affiliation of a street gang. Maslow (1943) recognized the importance of having basic needs met before one can address life's daily tasks, such as being able to go to work or school. As the participants in this study who shared their lived experiences routinely expressed, being poor while living in a neighborhood where one's personal safety is at stake is a quandary that must be addressed before engaging in school. To complicate matters, the environment inside and outside the home is not conducive to acquiring the skills necessary to be successful in school.

Interventions. While recalling their lived experiences, many of the participants expressed having academic struggles in elementary school. It was their recollection that the difficulties went unnoticed or unaddressed. Their accounts pointed to teacher frustration or the

teacher's inability to apply the appropriate intervention strategies. These missed opportunities to intervene seemed to alienate the students and cause them to feel inadequate or not able to keep up with their peers. Finn (1989) and Croninger and Lee (2001) posited that dropping out of school is the ultimate act of disengagement in a series of many that have accumulated over the course of the individual's educational path.

Within this research, two areas emerged where interventions were believed to be necessary: (a) at the school site, and (b) once the youth became involved in delinquent behavior. Both the men interviewed, along with educators, espoused the need for interventions that would help students access and understand the curriculum, as well as help with early childhood behavioral issues. Juvenile justice system workers maintained that early intervention is critical, but could not specifically offer any strategies that had been implemented previously and deemed effective. The educators cited the utilization of positive relationships and positive behavior interventions as an approach to redirect students when they were misbehaving in class. Juvenile justice system members and counselors focused on interventions in the area of behavior, dysfunctional home life, and early delinquency. With the exception of a veteran probation officer, no interviewed member of the juvenile justice system could offer any programs or interventions that would ameliorate a youth's desire to affiliate with a gang once he/she was found to be gang involved.

Howell and Egley (2005) and Sprague and Walker (2000) asserted that interventions should be preventative in nature as they may help deter an individual from becoming involved with delinquency and gangs. The need for interventions materialized across all three interview groups as being a necessary aspect of maintaining school engagement or a strategy for deterring entrance into the juvenile justice system. Early indicators for applying interventions are evident

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because they are high yield predictors that point to a dysfunctional home environment that can carry over to the classroom. Spivack and Cianci (1987) conducted a study where 611 inner city school children were followed. In this study, the researchers found a relationship between behavior ratings grades in kindergarten through three, and later incidents of police contact by age 18. Interventions at the school site are critical because gang affiliation typically occurs in middle school between the ages of 12-15 (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015).

A framework endorsed by Finn (1989) explained the early disengagement that may occur in school as a result of academic or behavioral struggles. The *participation-identification model* posits that most students participate willingly in school during the early grades, and that disengagement can be an indicator of alienation and behavioral difficulties. These behaviors tend to lead to further academic failures, culminating in a student's complete withdrawal from school in the form of dropping out (Finn & Cox, 1992). Early recognition and the implementation of appropriate interventions to address the warning signs are essential. Appropriate assessment and interventions allow for the execution of efficacious approaches and multi-tiered levels of support that can increase the student's feeling of connectedness during the crucial elementary school years.

Belonging. A significant number of the young men who described their school experiences and their eventual path to affiliating with a group of friends that ultimately led them to gang affiliation reported experiencing alienation within the school setting. Dysfunctional home lives, uncertain and unsafe neighborhood environments, along with academic struggles, culminated in behaviors in and out of the school that propelled them towards associating with individuals who shared the same misfortune. Research indicates that most gang members begin their gang affiliation between the ages of 12-15 (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). The vast majority of

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the men who shared their lived experiences maintained that they decided to join the gang during their middle school years. A perception of being alienated from the school environment can be detrimental and can lead adolescents to seek out environments or peers that will accept them and give them a sense of purpose and belonging. As Vigil (1993) posited, during adolescence, teenagers begin their quest to seek out their identity and have a strong need to belong. The social network and status that the gang provides can fulfill this need, adding to the appeal of gang membership.

Several of the men related that their assimilation into the gang lifestyle occurred during early adolescence. For some, it appeared to be a natural progression from school disengagement to associating with groups of teens who were already gang affiliated. For others, it was a means of survival or protection due to the environment they were struggling to navigate. However, many described the alienation that they experienced in elementary school as being profound. The angst of being humiliated, excluded, or misunderstood by their teachers was clearly unforgettable and had a profound impact on their sense of belonging within the school setting. However, several recounted one caring teacher who made a lasting impression due to their kindness, compassion, and willingness to take extra time to help them.

Within marginalized communities, children become street socialized and one's position within the hierarchy of the streets becomes evident as part of that socialization (Conchas & Vigil, 2012). In addition to feeling the need to belong, being respected was a need that the men valued and could be obtained by gang affiliation. For many of the young men, gaining respect is paramount and coveted. This form of respect can provide a person with status within their community and ward off the possibility of being attacked or victimized.

Educators strongly recommended and advocated that relationships should be developed with all of their students. One particular educator stated that she created a community within a community in her classroom. The teachers recognized the importance of maintaining an atmosphere where students feel safe and secure; however, the men in this study apparently needed more affirmation and sought out a culture that provided a greater sense of belonging than the classroom could offer. The classroom culture can be inclusive; however, the men reported experiencing academic struggles and behavioral issues that may have not been addressed despite the culture of inclusiveness. Not feeling successful may have a stronger effect on alienation than creating an inclusive atmosphere.

Juvenile justice system workers and counselors recognized that many young men from marginalized communities yearn for belonging and the gang is a medium that can fill the void. One counselor distinguished between a caring environment and one where a student feels connected. The absence of connectedness is extremely noteworthy, offering a powerful connotation that must be distinguished within the context of simply feeling wanted or accepted. True connection was the essence of belonging for many of the young men interviewed.

Caring adult. Several participants referred to the importance of students having an adult who is able to show compassion for and sincere interest in them. The necessity for an adolescent to feel cared for can be intertwined with the need for belonging and may cause adolescents to supplant the void of a caring adult with the sense of belonging that a group provides. Although belonging is a social-emotional element, having a caring adult is an important factor of belonging and can evolve into a role that might be influential. The importance of having a stable and reliable person to whom one can relate is believed to be an essential benefit for the young men in marginalized communities.

Educators commented that developing caring relationships with their students was crucial, especially for children who may not have stable home environments. Participants emphasized the significance of an adult who could develop a positive relationship, exhibit trustworthy characteristics, and exude a high level of compassion. The absence of a father, either physically or emotionally, was prevalent in many of the accounts of lived experiences. Many of the young men related a fond memories of an adult who exhibited high levels of care for them; however, many of the respondents indicated that the loyalty and reliability on which they could always depend on was imparted by their affiliation with a gang. Many of the counseling and juvenile justice workers felt that the young men sought out someone who showed them a feeling of being loved or cared about, since this was an element that was lacking in their childhood. The bonding that occurs with their friends, who were also those who partook in the gang's activities, were able to satisfy a particular need that was not met elsewhere. The notion of a caring adult surfaced as an important element for educators to fulfill; however, it is not clear if the role of an adult who exhibited a caring demeanor was as important as the need to feel accepted and mentored as the youth matured. Students will encounter teachers with cultural backgrounds, personalities, value systems, and dispositions that may be vastly different than what they experience at home and within their community (Coopersmith, 2009). As the student population becomes increasingly diverse, the pool of teachers is composed of predominantly White female teachers from middle-class backgrounds (Major & Brock, 2003). Consequently, the predominantly White middle class teaching force may not be able to effectively and authentically connect as a result of this profound incongruence. The role an adult may take on might evolve as the youth matured, transforming from a nurturing figure, to one who could guide and counsel.

Self-worth. During the interviews of all the participants within each of the specific groups in this study, the concept of self-worth, self-esteem, or youth's self-perception of themselves was referenced across all the participant groups. It is undeniable that self-esteem for children is an important issue regardless of where they live, their families' economic status, or their ethnicity. Depression, anxiety, and mental health issues are of major concern in school districts across the United States. Within our society and more specifically the micro communities in which people exist, there is at minimum a subconscious perception and personal evaluation of how we view our purpose in society. Our self-esteem and perception of worth is factored into this desire to feel accepted and, to a degree, successful. As students begin school, they all arrive at their educational settings with various personal attributes, as well as barriers that are out of their sphere of control. Although the school as an institution should be equitable and offer each student opportunities along with needed support, students from marginalized communities often face a host of challenges based on their personal circumstances that can affect their perception of self-worth. Spivack and Cianci's (1987) study found a connection between the behavior of children in kindergarten through third grade and later incidents of police contact by age 18. The aggregate effect of multiple instances of failure, frustration, and less than successful academic outcomes will likely result in alienation and detachment from the educational setting. Fortunately, the vast majority of students who face these challenges are able to avoid gang affiliation and, despite numerous barriers, avoid becoming entangled in the juvenile justice system. However, students from more affluent neighborhoods rarely, if ever, face the risks that are ever present for youth who are negotiating the challenges of marginalized neighborhoods. The ramifications of low self-worth may have significantly dissimilar implications when a child who resides in a marginalized community is alienated from the school

setting. The student may perceive that he/she doesn't have a purpose, or their level of success in school may not be at the level that is considered acceptable. Examining how students can feel successful in the school setting, despite their academic abilities or talents, should be considered in an effort to link these elements to increasing self-worth.

Many of the young men recall that they struggled either academically or behaviorally during elementary school and felt unwanted. In their responses, there was no mention of opportunities within the school, or through extracurricular activities that could provide an outlet or means to feel worthy. Activities outside of school such as sports, scouts, music, theater or other opportunities that are common place for children in more prosperous communities did not seem to be available to them. The lack of these resources clearly affected these young men. However, no other possibilities existed for them to experience some degree of success. Educators recognized the value of developing personal relationships to increase self-esteem and self-worth; however, they did not mention having a means to measure a student's level of self-worth. Juvenile justice system workers acknowledge that once students began to associate with other youth who were affiliated with gangs, the ability to change the youths direction was immensely difficult. A student's degree of self-worth is notable because it may influence their decision to seek acceptance and affirmation with a gang. Although one's level of self-worth alone is not the sole determining element, collectively, the themes relate to one another, and self-worth is a powerful component that deserves attention.

Conclusions

Three key conclusions were drawn from this study's analysis and interpretation of findings. These conclusions are reasoned inferences based on the evidence gathered.

C-1: Environmental factors play an extremely significant component in a student's life trajectory (environment, self-worth). The conclusions derived from this study illuminate that the geographic location in which they were raised was a chaotic element that incarcerated and formerly incarcerated males could not control during their childhood. Within this research, the factors that may influence gang affiliation and potential adult incarceration were examined. The influence of the environment was found to be consequential. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained, environmental influences surround the child based on time and place. He asserted that these influences—which he defined as the macrosystem, or society, the exosystem, or institutions, the mesosystem, or family, and at the center, the microsystem—have an effect on the child. Juvenile justice system workers, judicial members, and those who provided their lived experiences cited the significance of the young men's home life and neighborhood as having a considerable influence in determining the path they took in their lives.

Multiple marginality theory (Conchas & Vigil, 2012) maintains that forces such as racism, social and cultural repression, and social psychological factors are potentially contributing factors for a youth of Mexican descent to seek affirmation and acceptance via affiliation with those who belong to a street gang. When a child's environment is rife with violence, poverty, unhealthy socialization, and exposure to risk factors, the probability of affiliating with a gang will increase. Because there is a plethora of research to support the rationale that lower socioeconomic status neighborhoods are prone to gang activity, whereas middle class and more affluent communities are not, it is noteworthy to mention the importance of the educational system recognizing this as a considerable component of ensuring student success. There is a need to address these challenges when designing classroom management strategies, curriculum, and the manner in which social and emotional interventions are

implemented. School institutions would be negligent if they failed to recognize that educational, sociological, and environmental factors are entwined and must be considered when responding to the reduction in incarceration.

C-2: Cultural awareness for educators is deficient in the area of understanding street-socialized youth and their myriad of challenges in and outside the school setting (belonging, self-worth, interventions, caring adult). The findings in this study pointed to the necessity for the need for educators to acquire a deeper understanding of the norms and customs to which street-socialized students adhere, particularly those whose cultural backgrounds may be incongruent with the educators' backgrounds. As such, the culture of the classroom may be influenced by a White middle class value system within the classroom community (Klingner et al., 2005). A school district's top priority must be to establish a culture where all staff members are encouraged and inspired to develop a greater awareness and willingness to interact with those students *and* their families or caregivers in marginalized communities, along with those who are potentially subject to dysfunctional development based on negative environmental factors. Participants who conveyed their childhood experiences were able to describe circumstances outside of the school setting that clearly affected their actions in the classroom. Through the interviews with educators, it was apparent that they had compassion for the students' challenges; however, they could not articulate or adequately express an understanding of how their students ocialization and experiences could influence their actions.

In recent years, the recognition that educators must become culturally proficient has been at the forefront of understanding pedagogy in an attempt to improve academic outcomes and serve the needs of our country's diverse student population. As our educational system grapples with closing the achievement gap, the focus is typically on improving curriculum and instruction.

However, many of our underachieving students are facing significant environmental challenges and barriers that educators may not understand or be able to address so that students can be prepared to receive instruction. According to Conchas and Vigil (2012), academic disengagement is related to marginalization. Almost all of the educators and administrators responded that developing relationships with students was an essential and necessary element of creating a positive school environment. They believed that positive relationships were necessary for students' self-esteem and healthy development. Although it is important for educators and staff members to cultivate meaningful relationships with their students, truly understanding how the culture of the marginalized community experience impacts a student is crucial, but seemingly lacking. Teacher preparation and induction programs must create courses of study that train teachers in understanding street-socialized youth and the manner in which the student, family, and school can effectively support the unique attributes of the student. Their culture and socialization should be leveraged as an asset and strategies and curriculum should be created to tap into this valuable resource. Unintentional alienation occurs for some students, and within this state of disengagement, the student loses faith in the educational system because the purpose and relevance of attending school have been lost. As with most adolescents, having friends and feeling linked to a group is an overriding desire that can be strongly associated with the school as the nexus for these relationships; however, if a student is alienated from the school environment, he/she may seek a surrogate vehicle to fulfill this emotional need.

C-3: Timely and appropriate interventions are crucial (interventions, self-worth, belonging). According to the findings, it was clear that all three interview groups supported the need for interventions as a necessary aspect of maintaining school engagement or for deterring entrance into the juvenile justice system. A child's experiences prior to the sixth grade are

pivotal in forming their disposition as they transcend into adolescence and beyond. Practices, interventions, and tactics to mitigate any potential negative elements of these experiences must be employed. School districts must therefore implement interventions to support and enhance student efficacy. Research supports the belief that certain indications of a student's disengagement can become early predictors of future engagement levels (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Finn, 1989; Finn & Cox, 1992). The literature also supports the notion that low levels of engagement become more evident during the transition to middle school. and it is at this vital time when students report increased alienation in the educational environment (Balfanz et al., 2007). Many of the participants who shared their educational experiences commented on their inability to be successful academically, providing their own assumptions as to why this had occurred. Disinterest, inattention, and difficulties in understanding areas of the curriculum created frustration, leading to a perception that they couldn't be successful in school. The participants mentioned few specific interventions, and for those who did reference an intervention, it appeared extremely ineffective. Seminal studies have shown high yield predictor factors that may lead a student to fail to complete high school. One of these simple to obtain predictors is a student's attendance in the first grade. Others, such as literacy and behavior, have also been identified. The participants in this study and those whose lived experiences were examined shared common dilemmas where the school site could have intervened.

Members of the juvenile justice system could not identify any interventions that effectively deterred gang affiliation once the student had made the decision to become involved with the gang lifestyle, supporting the importance of timely and early interventions. Leaving a gang carries consequences, just as belonging to the gang does. In either case, it appears that interventions that are typically rendered by the criminal justice system come in the form of

conditions imposed by the probation department, which is mainly a means of control and monitoring rather than an intervention. Post-gang affiliation interventions may need to be specific to the individual and their circumstances, with the expectation that the intervention will be largely ineffective. Educators must recognize students who are exhibiting behaviors that may place them at risk of disengagement due to undiagnosed behavioral, emotional, or academic issues. It is also important to use effective assessment and screening tools that will provide results necessary to apply the appropriate intervention.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The purpose of this study was to investigate what influence or impact, if any, a student's educational experience prior to entering middle school may have on their desire to affiliate, associate, or otherwise become involved with the gang culture. Findings from this study may illuminate innovative or burgeoning interventions, in addition to practices and policies that could enhance engagement. Increased engagement and capacity enhance the connection to the school community, which may reduce alienation and maximize the influence the teacher and school setting can have on the reduction of gang affiliation and the incarceration of juveniles. This data will offer insight and clarity into these individuals' educational trajectory and give school administrators and classroom teachers a perspective that is currently not represented in teacher credentialing programs or professional development. The implications derived from the findings and conclusions in this study as follows: (a) a need for increased training for educators to expand the understanding of students who are socialized in low socioeconomic environments where gangs and violence are present, (b) school wide efficacy in the timely identification of students who require specific interventions, and (c) continuous multi-tiered systems of support for students should occur as they progress through school.

Teacher preparation programs and site-based professional development are lacking in their ability to confront the disconnect between teachers' lack of familiarity with students who reside in underserved communities. Because the majority of teachers who teach elementary school are White females with middle class upbringings whose students who have vastly different life experiences, it is likely that the requisite relational connection will suffer. Ideally, teachers would be able to understand the bioecological factors that marginalized youth encounter and their effect on their educational experience, while understanding that their pedagogical philosophies may either enhance or reduce student disengagement. Educators would understand the significance of developing positive relationships with at-risk youth, and how these interactions can benefit them throughout their educational experience.

Significant professional development is provided for curriculum and instruction, which includes improving the use of culturally competent pedagogy; however, guidance in developing relationships with students is deficient. Although attention is given to classroom management skills, without the ability to relate authentically to certain students, some of our youth will become disengaged. Teachers who possess the natural capacity to relate to virtually any child are highly regarded by their students because their relationship skills create a vital connection to the school community. Since teachers who possess this unique ability are few and far between, it is imperative that significant consideration be given to professional development opportunities and mentoring that can foster and increase our teaching ranks effectuality in fostering the skill of developing relationships with students through an understanding of their socialization and daily experience outside of the classroom. Districts should consider adopting hiring practices that take into account the teacher's disposition and the potential for developing strong bonds with their students should be a consideration. An awareness of trauma informed strategies that incorporate

understanding the socialization of students who reside in marginalized environments is critical to removing the barriers to student connectedness.

A number of schools throughout the United States have recognized the need to implement multi-tiered systems of support to increase student achievement through an approach that considers the whole child. However, each child is unique, and relying on teachers to recognize the potential need for an intervention will require increasing teacher capacity in this critical area. As reported by several of the men who shared their early educational experiences, they experienced numerous opportunities for intervention and support; however, the students' needs were either missed or overlooked, resulting in increased frustration and disengagement.

Several of the salient longitudinal studies on students revealed high yield predictors of dropping out of school, which is a definitive form of disengagement. It would be wise of school districts that implement multi-tiered intervention systems to analyze the data of past students who have struggled significantly or failed to complete school. A compilation of this data could be disaggregated to begin early identification of students who may require multiple levels of support. For example, special attention could be paid to early attendance problems because it is an indicator of potential dysfunctional circumstances within the child's environment outside of the school setting, which may require intervention and support. Analyzing early literacy rates and the relationship to behavioral issues are requisite data points that can produce useful information on a student's propensity to become disengaged and ultimately gang-affiliated. Analyzing previous histories of disengaged students will allow for proactive intervention that can be targeted specifically to increase school connectedness. It is essential to build teachers' capacity to recognize the indicators that may require a referral for support because they are in constant contact with the child more than any other staff member in the educational system.

As students leave elementary school, the risk of additional disengagement has the propensity to increase. Communication between the former elementary site and the new middle school are vital components of an effective approach to a tiered system of support. Elementary schools should practice using intervention teams that meet regularly to discuss students who have been referred as a result of exhibiting a particular concern that cannot be addressed by the teacher within the scope of universal, classroom-based management strategies. Once an assessment has been requested, the intervention team should be able to assess, discuss, document, and introduce an intervention plan. This data should inform the steps that are taken as the student either progresses or does not respond. Students who have exhibited concerns and have been referred to the intervention team at the elementary site level should be discussed with the receiving school site to ensure they are monitored properly and continue to receive the necessary support. Creating a comprehensive transition approach that is systematic and utilizes functional interventions to support vulnerable students is a practice that should be employed as standard practice in education.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the event that this study was to be replicated, three recommendations are suggested. The diverse experiences of the participants in this study contributed to the a deeper understanding of the factors that may contribute to elementary school disengagement and its relationship to gang affiliation and future incarceration; however, three recommendations for further research have been identified as a result of the key findings.

Firstly, in-person access to formerly incarcerated or currently incarcerated males is difficult and can be a timely undertaking. In order to expand the potential number of responses, the methodology could be modified to allow for questionnaires that could be mailed to inmates,

allowing for a greater number of potential respondents and a wider array of responses, supplemented with in-person interviews. Although this would limit follow-up questions, the questionnaires could be more focused in some regards, but also allow for open-ended responses. Quantitative data could be obtained in the same sample group through surveys or other data collection tools.

Another phenomenon of this study was the significant Latino gang violence that was occurring in a specific, non-urban setting. Future studies may collect data from respondents of various ethnicities on a state or national level, allowing for an expansive response on factors that contributed to educational disengagement and to ascertain if there was a connection to gang affiliation and incarceration.

Thirdly, future research could examine resilience factors in Latino males who grew up in similar geographical locations but did not fall prey to gang involvement. In some cases, this may involve siblings who took opposite paths; their experiences could be examined to learn what factors may have affected their engagement despite having potentially similar environmental experiences. Resilience factors might be identified to aid in developing students' social and emotional skills. Obtaining information from the former students who became engaged, as well as those who became disconnected from the educational system, could yield invaluable data that may inform future engagement strategies for school districts.

Reflection

Covey (1989) maintained that it is critical for us to seek to understand others rather than try to be understood in our efforts to communicate and guide others in the complex and often misunderstood process of transformational change. On a personal level, this research study has required me to pause and reflect on a daily basis, helping me grow as a person and as a leader in

my organization. The conclusion of this study did not bring crystal clear answers to an issue about which I feel passionate. However, it has brought me to the realization that this is only the beginning of a new chapter of my inquiry. Prior to starting my dissertation, I received advice from someone who said, "The best dissertation is a finished dissertation." I do not agree with this notion. I'm excited to have completed this study, but I also feel the need to pursue further inquiry and research. This study has taught me to ask questions, be reflexive, examine my own presuppositions, and approach what some may consider problems or misfortune as opportunities to learn. Upon embarking on this research study, the passion to investigate and ultimately disseminate information that could help decrease the number of juveniles who become entangled in the criminal justice system was the driving force; however, when asked what I had hoped to do with my research and potentially my career, I did not have an articulated path or vision.

As my research progressed and the review of numerous studies and journal articles consumed my weekends, a theoretical framework began to emerge. Constructing and envisioning this framework work became extremely fascinating and interesting to me. Assembling my literature review and theoretical framework enhanced my growth as a scholar and researcher. This skill set that I was acquiring began to illuminate how I might be able to use my research within my career and future endeavors. Through this process, it became evident to me that my growth was in the area of being able to conceptualize systems and guidelines that could be utilized to improve practices that could affect how school districts and their staff members can form a protective barrier for students as a means to prevent incarceration. This process has helped my narrow my focus and pave the path for me to use my enhanced knowledge and ability to educate and inform others on methods to improve outcomes for students who have previously been alienated or disengaged from the educational system.

Final Thoughts

Schools do not overtly create the pathway to prison, but the school as an institution may be complicit in the disproportionate number of minority males who become system-involved during adolescence if they do not shift their philosophy as it pertains to addressing students' social-emotional needs as a paramount priority. Attachment to the school community and experiencing a sense of belonging within the micro-communities that exist within the school's system can create a feeling of connectedness. Schools must shift their approach to student engagement in order to effectively address the multitude of needs a child must have met in order to maintain a sense of stability and a regulated frame of mind. None of the men who shared educational experiences referenced suspensions or punitive procedures as an issue in their educational experience; however, most dropped out of school before the age of 15. The findings indicate that it is not so much what the school *did* do, but what they *didn't* do. However, a contributing aspect of disengagement can occur when educators utilize classroom management strategies and tactics that alienate students. It would be prudent for schools to abandon discipline practices that are punitive in nature and utilize incidents of misbehavior as opportunities to teach students how to self-regulate their behavior through reflective and restorative practices.

Utilizing trauma-sensitive approaches that take into account the bioecological factors our students experience, our school systems can play a key a role in reducing the number of people who become incarcerated. However, this will require addressing students' trauma-related issues, addressing the root causes of behavior, and identifying and addressing learning difficulties as early as possible, while supporting students' families in this process. Initial interventions and responses to a student's needs should not occur during middle and high school. Resources must be allocated to ensure that early interventions can occur in an efficient, systematic, and

streamlined process. A shift in the mindset of responding reactively to delinquency, and in turn, determining what prevents it, is the philosophical change that must occur as responses to behavior, intervention strategies, teacher indoctrination, and improved practices are developed.

Once a juvenile has become formally system-involved and has claimed some level of gang affiliation, albeit a loose affiliation, it is extremely difficult to pry this individual from his peer group that he may perceive as his most loyal and closest group of friends. Common tactics used by the juvenile justice system are to place punitive restrictions on the teenager, which often creates increased chances that the probationer will continue to be incarcerated as a result of violating unrealistic probation terms. These terms or conditions nearly always include mandates that the student not associate with known probationers or those who are gang affiliated. This probation term places the youth in a situation where he must disassociate with his closest peer group. Most any teenager, gang affiliated or not, would not be successful in this task. The social group that is the preeminent factor in the youth's life is now off limits. In most cases, such a predicament only causes a stronger alliance with these youths, as they become extremely protective of each other. This allegiance is part of adolescence and is exponentially enhanced for street socialized youth. In the eyes of the probationer, the juvenile justice system has become the enemy, only bolstering his need to seek protection and loyalty from his friends who have oftentimes been vilified by this system.

Creating an intervention plan for the youth that allows mentors to guide and, to a degree, supervise the adolescent in lieu of the probation department may have more impact and influence than a system that does not allow for input from the probationer. This methodology should be examined with input from sociologists and psychologists who specialize in adolescent behavior. Partnerships with agencies who employ former gang members who have exited that lifestyle

should be consulted and their insight should be strongly considered. Thoughtful and realistic intervention plans should be developed for the youth who do become system involved and are associating with those individuals who have claimed gang membership.

Along with appropriate education plans for students transitioning from custody, vocational training and meaningful job placement should also occur, harnessing the power of the community, families, and organizations who seek to reintegrate youth who are choosing a path that has a high probability for negative outcomes. Members of the educational system can serve as partners with valuable insights into prevention and intervention strategies because they have likely seen these youth more than anyone else prior to their involvement in the juvenile justice system. The educational community, as a whole, should be regarded as a valuable and impactful resource in the efforts to prevent gang membership.

Chapter Summary

The STPP is a byproduct of a student's disengagement from the school system and is one of the negative consequences that occurs as a result of withdrawing from the school setting, either physically, emotionally, or both. The pathway to prison is most often set into motion during the early grades of elementary school and is exacerbated by the child's environment, negative peer influences, inadequate adult interactions, and eventual involvement in delinquent behavior. Zero tolerance mandates and punitive consequences utilized within the school system that are used disproportionately on minority students are significant contributing factors to the STPP. Although they are contributing factors, the pathway to incarceration often begins much sooner for students who go to prison, especially those who originate from marginalized communities. The multitude of factors that contribute to a student dropping out of school are closely aligned with factors that cause a student to choose association with other peers who are at

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high risk of incarceration, rather than engage in the benefits which the educational setting can offer. Students who do not feel that they have a purpose that the school setting can fulfill will have decreased self-worth.

Self-worth and purpose must be understood from the student's perspective. Future research must examine the factors that cause educational disengagement, along with those factors that increase engagement, and foster resilience. Preventing students' involvement in gangs and juvenile delinquency should be viewed from a preventative approach, rather than a suppressive and punitive approach. In the unfortunate event that a youth does become involved with a peer group identified as a criminal street gang and becomes involved in the juvenile justice system, motivating approaches that offer hope and opportunity should be initiated. As the juvenile probation officer, juvenile defense attorney, and retired juvenile court judge interviewed in this study all maintained, there were no programs that were able to prevent or dissuade youth from becoming gang affiliated once they were already involved. Suppressive and controlling tactics will not change behavior or produce a reduction in criminal activity, violence, or gang affiliation; however, it will increase the number of minority males who become incarcerated, decreasing their chance of rehabilitation. The ultimate goal of the criminal justice system is to eliminate crime, not arrest those who commit crimes. The educational system must focus first on educating families and providing them with strategies for increasing educational success, developing effective procedures to conduct tiered interventions, and building capacity to increase student self-worth through caring and positive relationships. Through these measures, school connectedness will likely increase and create a barrier that we should all embrace: one that stifles and impedes the entrance into the criminal justice system.

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Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES
TITLE OF THE STUDY

FROM STORYTIME TO HARDTIME: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF
SOCIOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO
SCHOLASTIC DISENGAGEMENT PRIOR TO ADOLESCENCE AND THE NEXUS TO
THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by (*David Diehl, Doctoral Candidate and Dr. Martine Jago, Ph.D.*) at the Pepperdine University. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research paper will discuss and examine the potential factors that contribute to the School to Prison Pipeline through a critical ethnographic approach and a critical theory framework. The intention of this study is to offer a position for analysis that will consider the relationship between sociological factors that intertwine with current educational practices and philosophies in public schools. Current teaching practices and educational policies that serve youth who are socialized in geographical areas that are marginalized, predominantly Latino, and prone to gang violence in a Central California County, will be examined. The unique aspect of this research is the significant and continuous level of Latino youth gang violence that continues to occur and has drawn national attention. This study seeks to explore the role the educational system can play in reducing youth gang affiliation and the increased chance of entrance into the juvenile justice system as a result of this affiliation. The researcher asserts entrance into the juvenile justice system is the catalyst that appreciably increases a juvenile's chances of adult incarceration, harm, or both, thereby reducing the chance at equitable post-secondary educational opportunities, future employment, and societal acceptance. The nexus between their pre-adolescent educational experience shall be examined as a means to identify the contributing circumstances and reduce gang affiliation. It seeks to discern proactive methods to diminish violence, entry into the juvenile justice system, and potential adult incarceration.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. *Answer 8-10 pre-determined questions.*
2. *You may preview the questions.*
3. *Interviews may be audio recorded.*
4. *If you do not wish to be audio recorded, you may still participate in the study.*
5. *The interview should not exceed 45 minutes.*
6. *Your identity will be kept confidential.*

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
None Anticipated
POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The objective of this study hopes to bring to light emergent interventions, practices, and policies by K-5 educational institutions that may prove to improve engagement and reduce alienation in order to maximize the influence the teacher and school setting can have on the reduction of gang affiliation and the incarceration of juveniles.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if we are required to do so by law, we will disclose confidential information about you. The members of the research team, the funding agency and Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may access the data. The HSPP reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

All necessary precautions will be taken to ensure that participants are adequately informed that their identity will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. The manner in which confidentiality is maintained will be disclosed in the invitation to participate and on the survey itself. Participants will acknowledge their understanding of the use of the interviews and classroom observations, the confidentiality safeguards, and the consent to voluntarily will be documented via their signing of the consent form. Interviews will be conducted at locations that provide adequate privacy. Data will be stored on the researcher's hard drive and will be password protected. Hard Copies will be printed as a backup source of data. Hard Copy data will be stored in the researcher's personal residence in a locked safe. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information will be used.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact: *David Diehl at* *david.diehl@pepperdine.edu cell: 831-229-2303 or Dr. Martine Jago at* *martine.jago@pepperdine.edu* if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho*, *Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at:

Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500

Los Angeles, CA 90045,

310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant:

X_____

***Signature of Research Participant   Date*:**

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of their questions. In my judgment the participants are knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed participation is voluntarily and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

_____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent: *David Diehl*

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   **Date:**

Informed Consent

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Psychology and Education

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES THAT EXCEED MINIMAL RISK

TITLE OF THE STUDY

FROM STORYTIME TO HARDTIME: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SOCIOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SCHOLASTIC DISENGAGEMENT PRIOR TO ADOLESCENCE AND THE NEXUS TO THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by (*David Diehl, Doctoral Candidate and Dr. Martine Jago, Ph.D.*) at the Pepperdine University. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research paper will discuss and examine the potential factors that contribute to the School to Prison Pipeline. The intention of this study is to consider the relationship between sociological factors that intertwine with current educational practices and philosophies in public schools. Current teaching practices and educational policies that serve youth who are socialized in geographical areas that are marginalized, predominantly Latino, and prone to gang violence in a Central California County, will be examined. The unique aspect of this research is the significant and continuous level of Latino youth gang violence that continues to occur and has drawn national attention. This study seeks to explore the role the educational system can play in reducing youth gang affiliation and the increased chance of entrance into the juvenile justice

system as a result of this affiliation. The researcher asserts entrance into the juvenile justice system increases a juvenile's chances of adult incarceration, harm, or both, thereby reducing the chance at equitable post-secondary educational opportunities, future employment, and societal acceptance. The connection between their pre-adolescent educational experience shall be examined as a means to identify the contributing circumstances and reduce gang affiliation. It seeks to discern proactive methods to diminish violence, entry into the juvenile justice system, and potential adult incarceration.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

7. *Answer 8-10 pre-determined questions.*
8. *You may preview the questions.*
9. *Interviews may be audio recorded.*
10. *If you do not wish to be audio recorded, you may still participate in the study.*
11. *The interview should not exceed 45 minutes.*
12. *Your identity will be kept confidential.*

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Individuals will be asked to recall childhood education experiences. A level of discomfort may be experienced in the recall process. Additional risks are breach of confidentiality and breach of identification.

GREATER THAN MINIMAL RISK:

Participating in the study means that there is a potential risk as well as a probability of discomfort that is anticipated in the research which may be greater than what one would ordinarily encounter in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations as well as tests. More specifically, individuals will be asked to recall childhood education experiences. A level of discomfort may be experienced in the recall process. Additional risks are breach of confidentiality and breach of identification.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The objective of this study hopes to bring to light emergent interventions, practices, and policies by K-5 educational institutions that may prove to improve engagement and reduce alienation in order to maximize the influence the teacher and school setting can have on the reduction of gang affiliation and the incarceration of juveniles.

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Protection Program (HSPP) may access the data. The HSPP reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

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INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact: *David Diehl at david.diehl@pepperdine.edu cell: 831-229-2303 or Dr. Martine Jago at martine.jago@pepperdine.edu* if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

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Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500

Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753

gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

AUDIO/VIDEO/PHOTOGRAPHS

□ *I agree to be audio recorded*

□ *I do not want to be audio recorded*

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant   **Date**

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of their questions. In my judgment the participants are knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed participation is voluntarily and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent: *David Diehl*

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   **Date**

Confidentiality Agreement

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Title of the Study

FROM STORYTIME TO HARDTIME: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SOCIOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SCHOLASTIC DISENGAGEMENT PRIOR TO ADOLESCENCE AND THE NEXUS TO THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE

I, _____, individually and on behalf of _____ [name of business or entity if applicable], do hereby agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all documents, audiotapes, videotapes, and oral or written documentation obtained for the purposes of this study. Furthermore, I also agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of any documents, including audio-taped or live oral interviews, or in any associated documents;

2. To not disclose any information received for profit, gain, or otherwise;

3. To not make copies of any documents, audiotapes, videotapes, or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by _____[person or organization borrowed from and/or whatever is applicable];

4. To store all study-related documents, audiotapes, videotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;

5. To return all documents, audiotapes, videotapes and study-related documents to
_____ **[person or organization borrowed from and/or whatever is applicable] in a complete and timely manner.**

6. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes, videotapes and/or paper files to which I will have access. I am further aware that if any breach of confidentiality occurs, I will be fully subject to the laws of the State of California.

Principal Investigators name_____

Principal Investigators Signature_____

Date_____

APPENDIX D

Teacher Survey

1. What strategies do you use to increase student engagement?
2. How would you describe the level of importance that teacher-student relationships have in maintaining student engagement?
3. How would you describe your proficiency in the utilization of culturally relevant classroom management strategies? Please describe how you employ these strategies.
4. What intervention strategies do you use for students who exhibit behavior problems in school?
5. Describe how you interact with families and include them in their child's education?
6. To what extent do you feel there is a connection to juvenile delinquency and a child's school experience or connection with the school?
7. To what extent do you feel the school has a responsibility to prevent juvenile delinquency and possible gang affiliation?
8. What suggestions, if any, would you have for elementary teachers and school administrator as it pertains to increasing student engagement?

APPENDIX E

School Administrator Survey

1. What strategies or do you suggest teachers use to increase student engagement?
2. How would you describe the level of importance that teacher-student relationships have in maintaining student engagement?
3. How would you describe your proficiency in the utilization of culturally relevant classroom management strategies? Please elaborate on how you utilize these strategies
4. What intervention strategies do you suggest teachers use for students who exhibit behavior problems in school?
5. Describe how you interact with families and include them in their child's education?
6. How important do you feel the student-teacher relationship is in the student's overall educational experience?
7. To what degree do you believe the teacher/school plays in a child's level of school engagement?
8. To what extent do you feel there is a connection to juvenile delinquency and a child's school experience or connection with the school?
9. To what extent do you feel the school has a responsibility to prevent juvenile delinquency and possible gang affiliation?
10. What suggestions, if any, would you have for elementary teachers and school administrators as it pertains to increasing student engagement?

APPENDIX F

Lived Experience Survey

1. Describe your school experience from Kindergarten through sixth grade.
2. Do you feel you had a good relationship with teachers at your school?
                Describe?
3. Who was your favorite teacher during elementary school?
                Why?
4. Did you have any teachers that you didn't care for?
                Why?
5. Did you ever feel that you were not wanted at school or were being pushed out?
                If so, when did that begin?
6. Did you have any behavior issues in school?

                When did they start?
7. Were you ever suspended?

                If so, can you describe the circumstances?
8. How old were you when you became affiliated with a street gang?

9. How old were you when you were first arrested?

10. Do you feel there was any connection to your school experience and your decision to become involved with gangs?

11. What factors, if any, could have caused you to avoid becoming gang affiliated?

12. What suggestions, if any, would you have for elementary teachers or school administrators?

APPENDIX G

Probation/Police/Social Worker/Criminal Defense Attorney Interview

9. Please describe your experience working with gang affiliated youth.

10. Have you observed any effective programs, strategies, or interventions that have had an impact on the reduction of gang violence?

11. What do you feel is needed to reduce gang violence or gang membership in our county?

12. Do you feel there is a crucial time in a juvenile's life which impacts their desire to affiliate with gangs?

13. What factors, if any, do you feel cause a juvenile to begin affiliating with a criminal street gang in our county?

14. How impactful do you feel a juvenile's educational experience is in his or her path to resisting or affiliating with gangs in our C

15. ounty?

16. Do you feel the educational system should play a more significant role in preventing juvenile delinquency and gang affiliation?